COMIC BOOK PROFILES™

$2.50

The magazine about comic book professionals

Issue No. 4 • Fall 1998

# John Romita

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WITH SUPPORTING INTERVIEWS BY

Gerry Conway
Chris Ivy
Stan Lee
Jose Marzan, Jr.
Graham Nolan
John Romita, Jr.
Virginia Romita
Jim Shooter
Roy Thomas
Keith Williams
and more!

# FROM THE PUBLISHER

I'd like to announce a special issue we're working on that will be coming out in early '99. It's a tribute issue to the late Archie Goodwin, and all proceeds from this issue will go to the Archie Goodwin Memorial Scholarship at the School of Visual Arts. This issue will be at least sixty-four pages long, and will include interviews with family, friends, and colleagues of Goodwin's. Associates from all stages of Goodwin's career as well as friends from Tulsa, Oklahoma will be contacted. Also, Fred Hembeck will have a special strip devoted to Archie Goodwin.

Thanks to those who responded to my query about space considerations regarding interviews and art. As you can see in this issue, we did what several of you suggested, and that was to reduce the font size. And for those of you who wanted more art, you'll be happy to know that no art was sacrificed, and indeed we did add some more. If you do have a suggestion or idea, please send it in. We are always looking for ways to improve, and we do appreciate your ideas.

We hope you enjoy this issue devoted to John Romita. If you'd like to read more about Marvel in the '70's. you can check out the second issue of *Comic Book Artist*, which is produced by the same people who do *The Jack Kirby Collector.*

I'd like to thank everyone who contributed artwork from their personal collections for this issue: Mike Burkey, Richard Howell, Enrico Salvini, and Mark Tomlinson. Fred Hembeck and Rocco Nigro made comic books available from their personal collections for use in this issue. Also, thanks go to Joel Thingvall for suggesting we talk to Mike Burkey and much belated thanks to Robert Beerbohm for putting us into contact with several key people way back in our first issue.

Special thanks to: Mike Burkey, Gerry Conway, Chris Ivy, Stan Lee, Jose Marzan, Jr., Graham Nolan, Mike Pascale, Jim Shooter, Stephen D. Sullivan, Roy Thomas, and Keith Williams.

Extra special thanks of course go to the Romitas: John, Virginia, and John Jr., who were especially helpful and cooperative. You're the best!

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# PROFILES

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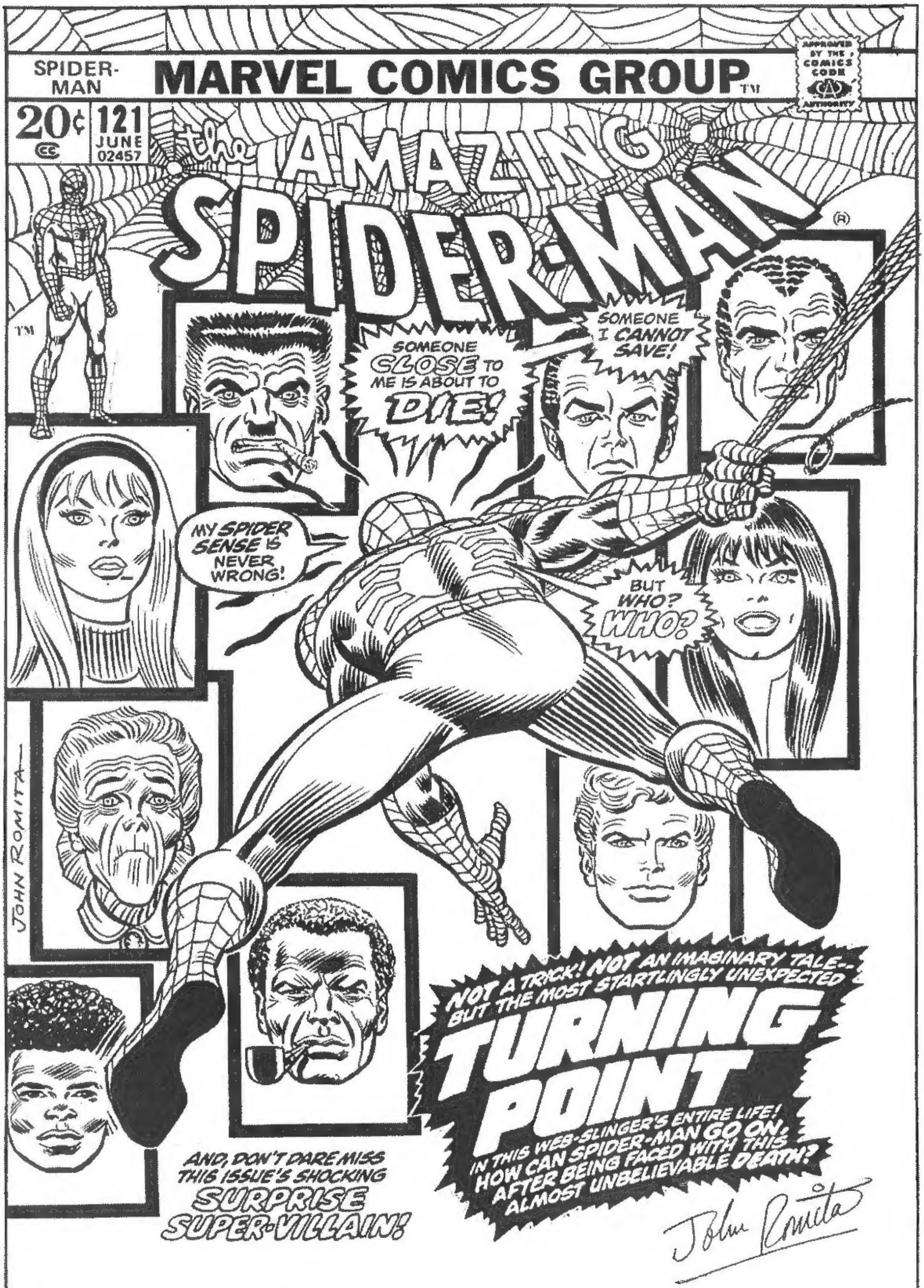
scanned by Potifar, June 2006

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PROFILE

# JOHN ROMITA

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*You were interested in drawing from a pretty early age?*
I was drawing from the minute I could hold a pencil, I think. By the time I was five, I was getting a lot of recognition and admiration from neighbors and relatives. Of course, if you admire a kid when he draws, he'll keep drawing.

*Of your family, three sisters and one brother, were you the only one that was interested in art?*
Yes. They were all blessed with singing and musical talent, and I would have killed to become a musician. I would have loved to have been a piano player or a guitar player. My music days were over once television came around. Once baseball came on TV my guitar days were over. I regret that to this day. I wish television had never been invented.

*Were you a Dodgers fan?*
Dodgers and Yankees fan. Even if the Giants were winning I would follow them. I was a baseball fan, but a *New York* baseball fan.

*What did you like to draw?*
Oh, I used to draw everything; from comic strips to things around the house. Once I drew a picture of a card game with about four or five men at the table. I remember drawing the legs of the table, the legs of each chair, the men's legs in a variety of positions under the table, a window shade, and a chandelier hanging above the table. The window shade I especially remember because I did the pull, a string with a little ring on it, and it was in perfect proportion. I wish I had saved that drawing because I heard about it for years, everybody was

# TIMELINE

# John Romita

**1930** John Romita born on January, 24th in Brooklyn, NY. He is the first of five children.

**1947** Graduates from the School of Industrial Art at the age of 17. Starts work at Forbes Lithograph.

**1949** Starts ghosting stories for Les Zakarin.

**1951** Joins the army and is stationed at Governor's Island. He leaves the army in 1953. Also that year, Strange Tales #4 is released.

**1952** John marries Virginia while he is still in the army.

**1954** John's first Captain America stories published.

**1958** Starts doing romance comics for DC. He would continue to do this until 1965.

**1965** Begins working at Marvel again. His first assignment is inking Don Heck on *Avengers* # 23.

**1966** Daredevil #12, John's first issue, is released. John takes over *Amazing Spider-Man* with issue #39.

**1972** Officially appointed Art Director at Marvel.

**1977** Spider-Man newspaper strip debuts.

**1983** Romita's Raiders program initiated.

**1984** Officially named Executive Art Director.

**1987** Spider-Man balloon makes its debut at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

**1996** John and Virginia retire from Marvel.

**1997** Kingpin is released.

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just amazed. I couldn't have been more than eight when I did it. It was just one of those things. You know, when you're lucky enough to be able to observe, and then translate what you observe onto paper, it's a blessing.

*You mentioned drawing comic strips as a child. Which were your favorites?*
*Terry and the Pirates* by Milton Caniff. Every Sunday I think I spent an hour, maybe two hours, just looking the strips over and over. I always tell young artists that I was lucky enough to have an inclination to look over every little thing then, and I was also lucky enough to be able to understand what he [Milton Caniff] did on the pages. I was twelve or thirteen then and I still have the original Sunday strips. They're brown now, but I have about three years of Sunday *Terry and the Pirates*, during the war, between '43, and '46. I was very much aware of everything he did. I was aware of how he did texture, and how he put blacks in. I could look at that stuff, and just plain understand. It was almost like he was giving me a blueprint. That's why he's been my idol since those days. I used to copy the Sunday pages with a fountain pen. Sometimes I would even add a little bit of wash by adding a little water to the fountain pen line. I would make black and white versions of Sunday comics because I couldn't afford to color. But I would do the whole thing just like *Terry and the Pirates*, even the lettering would be the same. I even signed my name like him when I was about twelve. *(laughs)* For a long time I had a big O in my name.

*Were you also interested in comic books?*
I remember *Superman* #1; I don't believe it was *Action Comics*; it was the one with Superman in an oval. For some reason, I don't know if it was my idea, I lucked out and got two copies. My instinct told me to protect one, so I put one in a wax paper bag, which was semi-translucent. The other one I traced into oblivion, I did that over a thousand times. I kept tracing over it until the pencils went right through the cover. So I remember that very well. I could almost draw it by heart.

*What happened to them?*
I don't know. My mother was not one of those people that saved everything in a book. I don't even have a lot of photographs of myself. I carried maybe fifteen or twenty books with me from house to house whenever we moved until I was about sixteen and then they disappeared. I don't know if *Superman* #1 was in there, but it probably was because I cherished a very small amount of books. I did not have a big collection, but these books stayed with me forever.

*What other books did you like when you were growing up?*
I remember buying *Captain America* #1. I loved it when I first saw it. I was also a big fan of Charlie Biro's books; the Daredevil was my favorite character. Biro was, I think, one of the least credited geniuses that we have. I think he did everything that Stan Lee did years later, but nobody noticed it, and nobody mentioned it. He was a genius. I think he should be documented as a legitimate genius, even though he was a strictly commercialized guy. The work he did is still memorable to me fifty, sixty years later. I remember George Tuska's work from the early 1940's. Those are the guys that I idolized from the beginning.

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*And you knew who these artists were at the time?*
Well, no. I think I knew by the time I was in high school. I think my fellow classmates and I discussed it, and then either I knew it and they reminded me of it, or I found out for the first time in my teens whose work was my favorite.

*After your first year of high school you transferred to the School of Industrial Art?*
In Brooklyn, at that time, you would go through elementary school which was six years, and then seventh and eighth grades were at grammar school. In the local neighborhood they called the grammar schools junior high schools, and you could go to ninth grade there also. It was felt that young kids should not go to remote high schools. So I only had three years left when I went to high school, and I went to the School of Art and Design, which was called the School of Industrial Art at the time. It was somewhat an experimental school. It was a normal, New York City high school, but it had a curriculum which was professional. In other words you were trained by professional commercial artists, for four years. Your first year was a foundation year, and then three years of specialization. But I only had two years of illustration, unfortunately. It was the greatest — to this day, every day of my life, I've used everything that I learned in that school.

AND NOW, WE GIVE GROOVY GARY AND ARTIE (LIFE OF THE PARTY) SIMEK A BREATHER WHILE RING-A-DING AND CAP TAKE OVER... AS ONLY THEY CAN!
WHUMP!
PWOK!
WHUNK!
KRAK!
EEEEYAAAAAHHH
OOOM!
5
Captain America #144, p. 5

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*When did you begin high school?*
In 1944, and I graduated on my birthday, January 24, 1947. I graduated at the age of 17 because I skipped about two grades in the middle years, so I was four-teen when I started going to Manhattan alone. I was a little wet behind the ears, and I probably didn't get as much out of school as I should have. But I did absorb enough of it, and that has stayed with me. The courses were great. The teachers were wonderful; I remember them like it was yesterday. They were absolutely sensational teachers.

*Was it difficult to get into that school?*
Actually I think it was. I think there was a waiting list, and I remember I had to do about a half a dozen drawings, and they specified what kind they wanted. I got in. I will tell you a little side story. I was probably the third best artist in my junior high school. There were two other guys, much more advanced than I was. I was told by one of them, a brutally frank young fellow, that I shouldn't be going to art school, that I just didn't have it. He was very confident that he was going to be the best thing to come to Manhattan from Brooklyn. I think he thought he was doing me a favor, saying, "I wouldn't do it if I were you. You're wasting your time, you should just go to a regular school. Don't lose your education." He sort of broke my heart. I had a lot of humility and I knew my limitations, but for some reason, what he said could not deter me. I went ahead and did it anyway.

*Did those two students also go to the School of Industrial Art?*
Yes they did, but neither one of them made it into the business. Even though they were very advanced; they were doing full-color artwork when I was still drawing in pencil.

*Your parents supported you in your choice of career?*
Oh yes. My father supported me culturally, but I don't think he ever expected me to make a living at commercial art.

*He wanted you to be a baker.*
Right. Well, he wanted me to be in the business. It was his dream to have a bakery shop. He figured that I would be driving the bakery truck from 3 in the morning till 6, and then I could do my artwork if I felt like it. His real philosophy was that everybody should be in civil service, work twenty years, and then retire on your pension. He always said I was crazy to not join the police force or, actually, the sanitation service. *(laughs)*

*Your Dad was a baker?*
He was a baker, and then he became a furniture finisher when the bakery business went sour. He was a very skilled furniture finisher. He did cabinet work, and he also did casket finishing. He worked for the National Casket Company in Long Island City for twenty-five years. He did beautiful finished work.

*What were your career goals when you were thinking about attending the School of Industrial Arts?*
I thought I would have a comic strip. In fact, when I was eleven years old, I submitted a re-vamped version of the characters for *Dick Tracy*. It was very ambitious and very cocky; I had a strange combination of cockiness and humility. I believed that *Dick Tracy* was going so badly that they needed help. So I sent the *Daily News* a stack of drawings of the way Dick Tracy and all the other characters should look. You know, they sent me a letter back. They were very gentle with me. They said that they admired what I thought, and it was very generous of me to offer them help, but Mr. Gould had created *Dick Tracy*, and they felt they should leave it in his hands. That's another letter I would love to have. I can't believe I didn't keep that letter. For the two weeks that I waited for an answer I was making plans for how I would do the strip. I couldn't believe that they would disagree with me.

When I got out of school, I sort of abandoned the comic strip idea, and didn't go out looking for work in that area. I often wonder what would have happened if I had. But I spent about three years doing commercial art for Forbes Lithograph. Before that I had done a medical exhibition on both sides of a wall of Manhattan General Hospital. I think it has another name now, but it was on 17th Street and 2nd Avenue. I was seventeen when I started and eighteen by the time I finished. I designed and executed the entire exhibition. I painted right on cardboard and mounted the cardboard on wooden frames, put wire on them and hung them from the wall. I did everything, from design to actual carpentry and hanging. I was paid sixty dollars a week for about six months to do it. At the time, it was big money. I think it was more than my father was making.

*So at the time, you were interested in a career in illustration?*
I was going to be a medical illustrator. About a half a dozen doctors at the hospital used to come in and watch me work. I had an office at the hospital, believe it or not, and they all were ready to plunk down contracts for me to illustrate their books. I assumed that every doctor that was working had a book in his mind. When I finished the exhibition I thought three of them were going to be ready for me, but none of them had actually finished any of the books. They were planned, but that was it. There was a plastic surgeon who was ready, but he just wanted a pamphlet. He wasn't looking for a book and I wanted to do full-color illustration. I really thought medical illustration was great because there wasn't much competition in it. I thought, "This is my business. I love it." But I never got any work. Fortunately when I was at Forbes somebody asked me to ghost a story for him, and that was the beginning and the end of my illustration career.

*At Forbes, you had a chance to do a lot of different things.*
Yes I did. I was doing touch-ups on paintings. Sometimes they needed an extra panel in educational materials done in watercolor dyes and I would match

the style of the artist. I was getting a great education. I would sometimes do Coke bottles and Coke glasses, with the drops running down the outside of the Coke glasses. It got so that I could do Coca-Cola in a glass or bottle in my sleep. It was a great training ground. I learned to do lettering, construction — I used to do the cutout displays they would have at soda fountains. I did a lot of Coca-Cola work.

*It was also when you were at Forbes that a friend of yours asked you to do some comic book work.*
Yeah. I met him on the train going to work one day, Lester Zakarin. He had been a cartoon major, but when he got out into the world reality made him become an adventure inker. He was pretty clever with a brush. He was inking whoever's pencils he could get his hands on. He couldn't get any work from Stan Lee, because Stan Lee wanted guys who could pencil and ink their own work. So he hit on the idea of us working together. He presented several of my pencils as his own, got work from Stan Lee, and we worked together for about a year. It was great. I was making about twenty dollars a page for pencils, and he was making about thirteen dollars for inks. I was making fifty dollars a week at Forbes after three years, so twenty dollars a page was amazing. It was wonderful. I did it while I was at Forbes for about three or four months.

*So you soon left Forbes?*
Yeah. I was only making fifty dollars a week. I asked for sixty, but they wouldn't give it to me. They were very short-sighted. I think I would have been a valuable asset to them if they'd have paid me the extra money. But they never did.

*What happened after you left Forbes?*
When I left Forbes, it was just about that time that I had to register for the draft. In the middle of 1950 the Korean War had started and all young men were suddenly 1-A. So I started to acclimate plans for the army. I thought I was going to fail the physical because I have a bad leg. I had polio when I was a kid, and I thought for sure, and my mother was counting on it, that I would be rejected. I was not too happy about that. I was thinking that it was going to be an adventure. But my mother was praying, and for my mother's sake, I was assuming that I was going to be rejected. They absolutely ignored all the measurements on my left leg, which are substantially different from my right leg, and they put me into a C profile category. This means not one hundred percent physically able but still eligible for service anyway. So that's what my classification was. I stayed with Zakarin until I got drafted.

When the army accepted me, I figured, OK, I don't mind. I didn't want to go to Korea, but I wouldn't mind being in the army. But I was lucky, I also had another friend who was a sergeant in the army who was working at the recruiting department on Governor's Island. They were doing recruiting posters and brochures for the army and he put my name in as a possible recruit for them. He told me it would be better if I requested induction, in other words, not to wait to be drafted. He said, "If you request induction, you'll have better control over things." So I said, OK, I'll give it a try. I don't know if my mother knew about it. I think if she knew about it she would have killed me. But I requested induction and got in in 1951. He also told me to go to a local training camp like Fort Dix, and when I was almost finished with my training to give him a call and he would put in for me and we would see what happens. I figured it was a long shot, and put it in the back of my mind. When I finished the training, which was about eight to ten weeks, I did call him. He put in a request for me, and sure enough, before I was shipped over to Germany, the request came in that I be transferred to Governor's Island. You know, with my luck, if I'd desperately wanted it, I wouldn't have gotten it. After I got married, I went to work every morning by ferry in uniform.

*You got married while you were in the army?*
I got married in 1952, six months before I was discharged.

*How long had you known Virginia?*
I knew her from the time she was nine and I was eleven. She used to live upstairs from us in Brooklyn. We were neighbors. We grew up together.

*Childhood sweethearts?*
We weren't sweethearts until ten years later, but I

used to see her every day. She played with my sisters every day.

*What did Virginia think of you being a comic book artist?*
When we started going together I was already a comic artist. Just about the time we started going steady, I was working with Zakarin. In fact, I remember her accompanying me to Zakarin's house several times to give him pages and discuss artwork. She was all for it. I used to tell her, "You know, this is a very precarious business, and that every year could be the last year." I thought there was no future in comics, and I was only in it temporarily. When comics petered out, I figured I would do illustration. I thought I would go into some studio in the city and do advertising art, or hopefully illustration in the *Saturday Evening Post* if I got good enough. That was my dream. That was my expectation too, and Virginia went along with it. Also, remember that at the time comics weren't considered legitimate. In fact it was looked down upon. Very few comic artists used to admit we were doing comic books. We were all "illustrators," and we would be illustrating comics until we could get magazine work or newspaper strip work. That was everyone's dream. Most of us in the comics business were dreaming of ghosting a strip or getting a strip of our own.

*So while you were in the army, you did recruiting posters?*
Yes, I did them in watercolor and semi-opaque. I did one that was in recruiting stations all over the world. I tell you, I had my name on there as big as life, and it was everywhere in the world and it was the biggest thrill of my life. I felt like I went downhill after that. *(laughs)* I was big time then, I was working with Norman Rockwell types, and I figured, "Wow, who wants to go back to comics?"

*While you were in the army, you started working for Stan Lee.*
Yes. I went up in uniform and told his secretary that I was working for Stan, but he never met me because I had been ghosting for someone else. And his secretary came out with work. Stan gave me a story that he also expected me to ink. I was shocked, but I wasn't going to say I couldn't do it. So I took it and struggled through the inking. It was the first time I ever had to ink a commercial job. But I got through it.

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Preliminary cover to *Marvel Age* #54

*Was that in Strange Tales #4?*
Yes, the one with the baby. That was the first story I did with my own name for Stan Lee.

*Why did you stop the ghosting arrangement?*
I had gotten some cover work from Trojan Comics, doing some western covers for them. I liked the idea of branching out and doing other things, instead of waiting for Les Zakarin to get me work. I think we were having trouble getting work together. So by the time I got out of basic training, I realized that I better

go out and get my own work. We never had an argument or anything, we just drifted apart. When I started getting my own work I never even checked with Lester. I guess I was a little bit lacking in grace.

*You were pencilling and inking?*
Yes. I started right away pencilling and inking for Stan. Every time I inked a job I learned some more. I remember one day he gave me a full-size pencilled photo-stat of a page that had been inked by George Tuska, with big bold brush strokes, and he told me that was the kind of style I should aim for. I had that in front of me for a long time in my studio. It was a wonderful example because you could see where he had deviated from the rough pencils underneath. They were his own pencils, they were just scribbles, really, but then he would ink them with these big beautiful bold lines. I tell you, it staggered me. So then, instead of using a very small, fine brush that Zakarin had taught me to use, I went to a bolder brush, and I got a little bit closer to *Terry and the Pirates*.

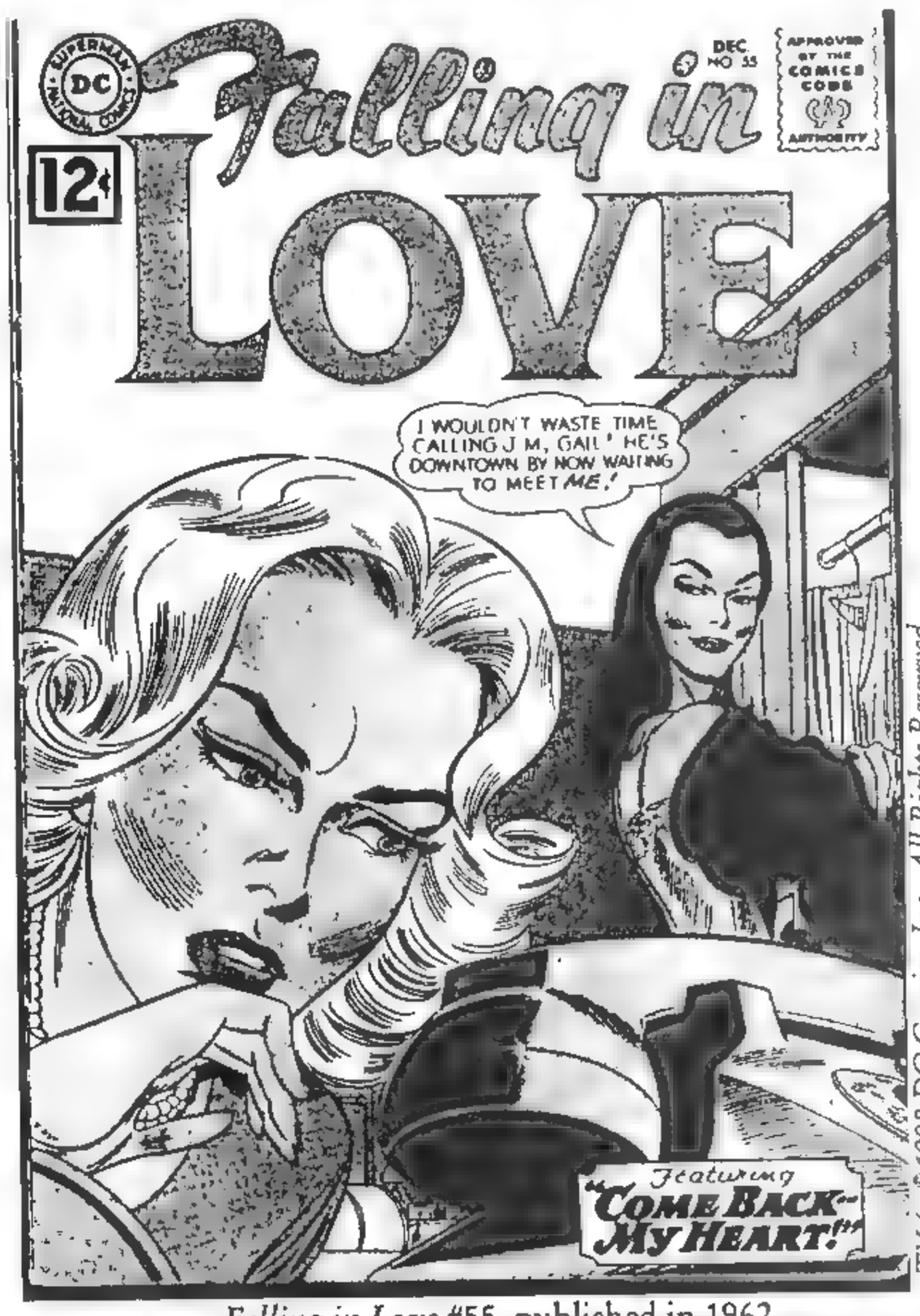
CROSSFIRE
BAM
BAM
THEY HAD BEEN FIRING FOR FIFTEEN MINUTES GUIDED BY THE MYRIAD OF DELICATE INSTRUMENTS WHICH CONTROLLED THE MASSIVE BIG GUNS
ON THREE CHECK ELEVATION AFTER SIX DEFLECTION SET CHECK AND READY!
BARRROOM
From *War Adventures* #9, published in 1952.

*In the fifties when you were working for Stan Lee, you did all sorts of different books.*
I did what he called mysteries, which were really semi-horror stories, war books, westerns, even a little bit of Captain America. Actually I did short stories in the book called *Young Men*. I did three or four of those, and then we did several issues of *Captain America*. They quickly cancelled it. It was a strange time. Stan got a lot of criticism for what they called chauvinism. There was a period there in the fifties when if you were a communist you were to be hanged in the public square, but if you were too patriotic you were a chauvinist. For some reason it seemed as if patriotism was a dirty word. *Captain America* took the rap for that. Stan, who was trying to be moderate and middle-of-the-road, was caught in the middle. So *Captain America* became a political issue, and it was dropped because it got to be too controversial. Everyone was saying that the American flag was starting to get a dirty name. It was terrible.

I loved doing *Captain America* because it had been one of my favorites, and Jack Kirby had been an idol of mine and I just plunged into it, and thought, "Wow, this is sensational." I think that most super-heroes at the time were not received too well. Sub-Mariner and Human Torch were put out at the same time and those two lasted about a year longer. But essentially none of them made out too well. Bill Everett had come back out of the greeting card business to do the Sub-Mariner series and Dick Ayers was doing the Human Torch. Carl Burgos ,the creator of the Human Torch, was working on covers for Stan at the time.

*When you were working for Stan he had you go see Joe Maneely?*
That was when I first went to him. I learned inking as I went along; after every issue I would improve. But my improvement was still not fast enough so Stan sent me over to Joe Maneely's studio in Flushing. He called up Joe and said, "I'm going to send a young artist over and I just want him to watch you work for a while." So I spent the whole day there, and he was the most generous, amazing artist. He was a genius. Everybody who worked at Marvel knew who he was. He was the fastest, most versatile guy I ever saw. He could draw anything. He could do humor, romance, medieval, gothic, west-

erns; he did the best westerns outside of Jack Kirby. While he was giving me pointers, talking about silhouettes, and contour lines, he was turning out the damndest pieces of artwork you ever saw. He turned out a double page spread, I saw him pencil it, and by the end of the day it was inked. It was a fort with an Indian attack; it was like a mural he created before my eyes. And everything I saw him do, rubbed off on me. In one day, I got everything that Stan wanted me to. I just immediately transferred it to my work. It was one of the greatest experiences I ever had. For years after he died, I would tell people that if Joe Maneely had not died prematurely, he would have done the bulk of Stan's work and half of us would have been out of work. He was capable of doing everything that Stan needed. There's no telling what he would have been able to bring to a character like Spider-Man. He was quite a man.


DC
12¢
Falling in LOVE
DEC. NO 55
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
I WOULDN'T WASTE TIME CALLING J M, GAIL ! HE'S DOWNTOWN BY NOW WAITING TO MEET ME.!
Featuring
"COME BACK-- MY HEART!"
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*Falling in Love* #55, published in 1962.

*During that time you also worked for DC doing the romance books.*

I wanted to branch out, I felt the need to branch out, so I did some occasional romance stories. Stan Lee had seen them, because I didn't hide them from anybody, and he said, "You know you're on a priority list. You're getting the first work I give out, but if you work for DC I won't be able to give you my prime stories." So I just dropped the DC stuff. Then about six months later, Stan Lee cut right down to the bone and closed shop. There were only about two guys working for him after that. That was 1958. So I went to DC for romance work, and I was grateful they took me back. Actually, I made a great deal out of it because I was making about twenty-four dollars a page, pencils and inks with Stan. In 1958 the industry had gotten really depressed, and I had gone from forty-four dollars a page to twenty-four dollars a page, and like a moron, I just accepted the cut, one or two dollars at a time over two years. Eventually my page rate was cut in half. Soon after I stopped getting work for Stan, I started doing the romance work for DC for thirty-eight dollars a page. So I got a fourteen dollar per page pay raise just by Stan closing down. Even though I was angry, I still thought, "Wow. This is what is known as landing on your feet." I did that for about eight years. My general philosophy was that I'd keep working until they kicked me out. It wasn't that I didn't have any ambition, it was that I didn't have the guts to go looking around for better work at better prices. If I could get steady work I was happy. As long as I didn't have to go into the city looking for work I was a very happy boy. But it was very stupid and counter-productive. I spent eight years doing love stories and I almost had a nervous breakdown.

I was working at DC, doing romance pretty much exclusively. I kept hoping that maybe Julie Schwartz would come in and say that they had seen my work and would I like to try Superman. But they never did. I used to walk through the bullpen and talk to all the

letterers and production people, and they all knew me. The editors that I worked with all liked me, and one of them gave me the lion's share of all the romance work. So I was respected up there, but I was never a pushy guy. I was waiting for one of their editors to come to me and say, "Hey, we like your stuff. How'd you like to come and do Batman?" But they never did. And I was not angry, what I thought was, "I'm not good enough." So I accepted it. Then by 1965, DC had built up a big inventory of romance stories. They just decided to use their inventory up and lay people off. So they suddenly say, "John Romita, thanks for eight years of hard work, but we don't need you anymore." I was burnt out and I thought I was going to get out of comics. I went and got a job up at Batten, Barton, Dursdon, and Osborne advertising agency in July of 1965. Then I went and had lunch one day with Stan Lee, to say goodbye, and he conned me into staying into comics. He said, "You were made to do comics, why are you wasting your time in advertising?" Well by the time he finished, he matched the salary that BBD & O was going to pay me, he guaranteed me salary even if I didn't get work, and I just accepted.

*So you were on contract with Stan?*
Well, it wasn't a written contract, it was a verbal agreement. It was on a handshake. But he guaranteed to pay me, and that's why I took the job, because I didn't want anymore of that uncertainty. Twice I had lost my livelihood. I told Stan, "What I'm looking for is security." So he guaranteed me $275 a week. I really needed the security because I was having a lot of periods where I was burnt out and couldn't work. Stan said, "Don't worry about it. You can work any way you want to. If you feel you can't get any work done at home you can come in to the office for a week, we'll make room for you. If you want to work at home, work at home." For about two years I had a choice of working at home or at the office, and sometimes I would work at home, and sometimes I would work at the office. It was great. He guaranteed me the money, and I earned it. He never gave me any money that I didn't earn. But the guarantee was behind it that if I didn't get work he was going to pay me anyway. I don't know if that would have been true, but that was the deal.

*One of the first things you started working on when you went back to working for Stan was working on Daredevil?*
Yes. At first I inked a Don Heck Avengers story [*The Avengers #23*], which was wonderful, because I also had the chance to ink a Kirby cover. I had told Stan, that since I had so much trouble producing pencils for romance stories that I just wanted to ink. He was agreeable to it, but I think he was conning me all along. I don't think he expected me to stay inking. So I inked that first story. And that's it. That was my inking career because the next thing I heard from Stan was that there was an emergency on *Daredevil*, and how would I like to pencil it? I said OK. I tried the first three pages, and he [Stan] said, "They look like romance stories." So he calls up Jack Kirby, and tells Jack, "I've got John Romita here, (Jack and I had met a couple of times already) I want him to do *Daredevil*, but he's having trouble getting the dynamics, how would you like to break them down?" There wasn't a real breakdown where you draw all the figures, it was more like a pacing exercise called 'layout.' He did the layouts for *Daredevil* #12 and #13, which were stick figures and sometimes silhouettes, with initials to tell you which characters were which. There were no expressions, no features. I have an example of it; I still have one for some lucky reason. When I got the pages back, I also had one of the rejected layouts that Stan asked me to redo. Rather than erase his [Kirby's] work, I just re-did it myself, and I kept the original layout. It's one of my prized possessions. In fact, I still have those two issues, intact, complete, because I pencilled and inked them. They're prized possessions to me. It was the only time that Jack and I worked on a project extensively.

*Was it difficult getting used to not working with a full script?*
It was a very intimidating arrangement where the artist had the complete pacing and focus obligation on his hands. I thought it was going to kill me. I didn't think I could do another story. The first time I did a story was when I was nineteen, and I thought I had used up every shot in my imagination in the first story. I thought, "How the hell am I going to do another story?" Because the obligation was to come up with a different shot every time. I was paralyzed. So when I did this first plot, I was exhausted. What

Jack did was great. It broke the ice, because I could see the possibilities he saw in the plot, and from then on I was rolling. After that second story I really understood it, and I started to react the same way that all the other guys did. Then it became increasingly easy.

In working on a plot, we usually did it verbally. Stan and I would get together for an hour or two and we would talk about the villain, the general gimmick of the story, try and figure out the exact opening, the fight scenes, and an interesting twist at the end, plus the personalities and personal life threads running through the story. We would work that out verbally. I was a little bit nervous because I kept thinking I was going to forget the important things. It's difficult when you do a verbal plot because you have a tendency to only remember what *your* suggestions were. Actually, now I find working with a script very restrictive.

*In 1966 you started working on Spider-Man. Is it true that you didn't think Steve Ditko would be gone long?*

Yes. Stan asked me, "Would you fill in on Spider-Man?" It was an experiment, because he wasn't sure I was the right guy for it. I probably wasn't, because I don't have what you would call an "off-beat" approach. I had a very standard approach with very standard comic figures, and it was really not a guarantee that I could do it. So I said sure, I would do it. But I fully expected that Ditko would come back after a few months. I know that if it had been me, if I had done a three year success story, I wouldn't have been able to give up the story. I would have come back to the character. It's just that Ditko was so different in his approach to storytelling with Stan that they just did not work well together.

*Initially, when you started on Spider-Man, you did try to do it in Ditko's style.*

I actually thought I was ghosting it and was trying to simulate his style. If it was different that's because that was as close as I could get. It was my inadequacy that I couldn't really ape his style; it was not natural to me.

BUT, WHAT OF OUR THREE CAPTIVE AVENGERS, IN THE FAR FUTURE? EVENTUALLY, THEY BEGIN TO AWAKEN, ONLY TO FIND...
WE'RE PRISONERS! TRAPPED IN SOME SORT OF OVERSIZED PICKLE JARS!
BUT WHERE IN THE BLAZES ARE WE? AND WHO PUT US HERE?
WELL, WHOEVER HE IS, HE'S PRETTY SURE OF HIMSELF! DIDN'T EVEN TAKE MY BOW
WITHIN SECONDS, THE TRIO REALIZES THEIR CAPTOR POSSESSES VAST, UNDREAMED-OF SCIENTIFIC POWERS...
LOOKS LIKE GLASS.. BUT IT'S A HUNDRED TIMES STRONGER! EVEN MY BLAST ARROW
AND THEN, THE FRAIL-LOOKING BEAUTY, WHOM MANY CONSIDER TO BE THE WEAKEST AVENGER, MAKES A DECISION...
IT WILL DRAIN A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF MY HEX POWER, BUT WE MUST FREE OURSELVES!
NO MATTER WHAT THE EFFORT.. I MUST CONCENTRATE! CONCENTRATE!
...AND THEN...
BY THE TALENT WHICH LIVES IN THE HEART OF ME, I HEX THIS CAGE LET ME BE FREE!
KRAKK!
TOO MUCH STRAIN! ALMOST... BLACKING OUT.. MUST HOLD ON.. LONG ENOUGH.. TO FREEZE LEVER.. AND.. RELEASE OTHERS.. MUST HOLD ON!
SHE'S DOING IT!
SLOWLY, SISTER.. SLOWLY! YOU KNOW HOW VULNERABLE YOU ARE TILL YOUR HEX POWER CAN BUILD ITSELF UP AGAIN!

*Avengers* #23, Don Heck pencils, Romita inks

*Scarlet Witch and Hawkeye TM & © 1998 Marvel Characters, Inc. All Rights Reserved.*

*How long did you try to emulate his style?*

I was doing it for the first six months. I was doing it practically from old Ditko books. I would do general layouts in his style, and do general character studies, and try to get the Ditko look. The only thing I changed was the girls. He did a very beautiful Gwen Stacy; she was supposed to be a very cold-blooded and cold fish kind of girl. I could not help but make her lady-like and considerate. Every time I changed her personality in the drawing Stan was forced to change her in the script. He used to argue with me about that. Ditko used to purposefully make his girls cold, to make Peter Parker look like more of a nerd. The girls were so mercurial. If I've got a girl, and she's a heroine of sorts, I make her sympathetic; I couldn't help myself. It's weird. I think I caused Stan almost as much trouble as Ditko.

*Mary Jane was a classic example of what you're talking about.*
That's the interesting thing. Stan and Ditko didn't want to pull the trigger on what she looked like. They were probably going to keep her a mystery. I just read the *Essential Spider-Man*, the black and white collection, and I just saw something that I had not noticed before. Strangely enough, they actually tipped their hand, I think it was in issue #28. Even though they did not show her, she was described as looking like a movie star. I never remembered that. I kept telling people that they had not decided whether she should look good. Stan probably forgot that he wrote that too. He was the one who said, "What do you think, should we make her pretty or not?" Then we sort of decided at the eleventh hour that we would make her pretty, and it's a good thing we did, because it would have contradicted what he'd written before. Even though they didn't show her features, they established that she was gorgeous. And I feel stupid, because for thirty years I've been saying, "We decided to make her beautiful." I've got to tell that story to Ditko the next time I see him.

*You had a very long run on Spider-Man.*
Yeah. With a few breaks. Stan would occasionally take me off and put Gil Kane on.

*One of the breaks was the drug books [Amazing Spider-Man #96-98] not approved by the comics code authority pencilled by Gil Kane. Was that just a coincidence?*
It was. I plotted all those stories. When people would ask me why we put Gil Kane on those issues, I would say, "You know, it's just the luck of the draw." I envy Gil because, for some strange twist of fate, he got all the what I call "the landmark" issues. Stan and I had plotted the stories. We were requested by the federal government to do a story showing the pitfalls of drugs, and then the code refused to give us approval. We were absolutely flabbergasted because this was a public service we were doing. We did it as entertainingly as we could, and the code misinterpreted the whole thing. We did not glamorize drugs. We still to this day don't know why the code was acting so foolishly. So Stan and Martin Goodman had the guts to put it out without the code, and it turned out to be a wonderful, beneficial project. I was proud of those issues. But it always tormented me because I never had the chance to do them. I had plotted it and the whole idea was half mine. Then the death of Captain Stacy, the death of Gwen Stacy, the Green Goblin's death; all were done by Gil. It was just the luck of the draw. It didn't have anything to do with anybody's personality or style. I co-plotted almost all those stories. It's maddening.

*You were busy doing other things at the time?*
Stan was always using me on other things. He used me on *Captain America*, on *Fantastic Four*, you name it. There were months and months where he would ask me to just concentrate on covers because they were getting a little dull or repetitious. He would ask me to run the covers for six months or a year and then somebody would have to come in to help out; Jim Mooney would come in, John Buscema broke down some stories, Gil Kane would pencil entire stories. I was usually saddled with the problem of overseeing the entire book; Stan wanted my touch on it anyway. That's why there are so many of my damn heads sticking out of other people's artwork. Everybody thought I was an egomaniac, putting my stamp on everything. But that wasn't true. Stan would say, "What I want you to do is look the pages over and when it doesn't look like Peter Parker change the face, if it doesn't look like Aunt May, change the face." Generally, even if I wasn't officially on the book, I was. A lot of times, he gave very ambiguous credit. He would call me "Creator Emeritus," "Co-plotter," or whatever crazy little plot credit he could give me, he would put in there, even if I hadn't done the bulk of the work.

*That was a fairly common practice back then.*
I had to do a lot of that. The reason mostly, is that I was there. If I was working at home, he wouldn't have done half of that. Although he used to have Marie Severin and Herb Trimpe make changes too. Whoever was there was generally stuck with the embarrassing proposition of making changes on their friend's artwork.

*Did you feel uncomfortable making these changes?*
Constantly. I constantly felt uncomfortable and I would apologize to people like Jack Kirby and John Buscema. I understood it on one level as an editorial change. In other words if the faces, and the expres-

sions, and the position of the figure contradicted the dialogue Stan wanted, I understood completely why changes had to be made. I used to change Gene Colan's and Don Heck's work, for that reason. It had nothing to do with quality, it had to do with interpretation of the story. If a character was supposed to have their teeth gritted in anger, and they were smiling, I would have to change the face. So people must have thought I was an ego-maniac. Then they'd meet me and say, "Gee, you're such a nice guy." Implying that they thought I was some kind of an ogre. I even had to change Barry Windsor-Smith's work when he did Conan. On one of his first covers Stan had me do a face over, and to this day I cringe every time I see it, because it was so clearly a patch.

*In essence, you practically functioned as the Art Director when you first arrived at Marvel. But it was in 1972 when you were officially named art director.*
It was a transition. Stan Lee used to have an indoctrination speech. The normal Stan Lee introduction to Marvel Comics. He would tell a young artist, "This is the way we like to tell a story. It's like silent movies, sort of broad acting, and exaggerated motion, and exaggerated expressions. We would never do anything timidly. We would do it broadly and intensely." This is the speech he used to give me back in the fifties, even before it became Marvel Comics. Even then, he always had this speech ready for young artists. Don't do the mild thing, do the exciting thing. Don't do the timid thing, do the bold thing. When Stan wasn't around he would say, "John tell them what we like." So I ended up telling all new people what Stan wanted. Suddenly I was telling everybody and so therefore I was the arbiter and when they came in they would say ,"Let John Romita look it over and see how close you came." Before you know it I was Art Director without pay. And truthfully, that's what happened. All that art director time came out of my deadline. Only a fool would have let it happen. And I was that fool. *(chuckles)*

*We talked earlier about you wanting to do a comic strip. Finally, in the mid-seventies you got your opportunity with the Spider-Man comic strip. Was it everything you thought it would be?*
Well it was mixed emotions. If I was going to do the strip, I would have had to take a leave of absence from the job. I didn't think the strip had a great future because no adventure strip had been started, let alone succeeded during that time. Adventure strips were disappearing. We knew it was a long shot. Both of us [Stan and I] gave it a year and a half to two years before it would die. So I said, "I can't quit my job over this." I told them I'll do dailies only or I'll do a Sunday. The syndicate that was going to do it agreed to do dailies only. I would do a week of strips a day, that was the equivalent of doing three pages and I thought I could incorporate that into my schedule. At the last minute, the strip was changed to a daily *and* a Sunday. By that time I had put so much work into it I didn't want to just give it up. So I took it on, saying I'll split my week. I'll keep my job for half a week and for the other half of the week I'll do the strip. Which was very bad for me, money-wise and time-wise, because neither one of my jobs was given enough time. I lasted four years on it but only because Virginia was so patient with me. She was the biggest help in the world and I had help right away from my colleagues. I had people helping me inking, I had some people doing breakdowns occasionally. I was always behind the eight ball. I was late the day we started. I wouldn't have passed it up for the world because it was wonderful to reach the European market, the South American market, and get letters from all over the world. It was wonderful to reach all those people. I wouldn't have passed it up, but it was exhausting. It wore me out. Four years was my limit. The deal I had with Stan was, as long as the strip's circulation was growing I would stay with it because I didn't want to pass up the chance that it would be a blockbuster. So it did grow for about three years, and that was wonderful. When it started losing papers in 1980, I told Stan, "I think I'm going to have to phase out." Because I was getting exhausted, and I was either going to have to quit my job or leave the strip. Since the circulation was starting to shrink I figured there was not much of a future in the strip. I would stick with my job. Again it was my timidity, I don't know if I chose right or wrong. I don't think the strip's making that much money now, but I would have had a long run on it. The strip's been going on now for twenty years.

*We've been talking about Spider-Man, and one of the most unique things that you did with him was to make*

# JOHN ROMITA

*him into a balloon for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. How did that come about?*
That was exciting. Frankly, it was just one of those lucky combinations. At the first meeting, there were the Macy's engineering people and the designer, Manny Bass. He's really the genius behind the parades and the floats. He and I talked about aerodynamics, and he said to me, "It's very important. Most human figures fail as balloons, as opposed to cartoon figures like Mickey Mouse because the cartoons have big heads." The engineering principle is the bulk of the helium has to be at the highest part. He said that with the Superman balloon they had a lot of trouble keeping the helium in the extremities because he was realistically proportioned. His hands actually used to droop because they could not keep the helium in the fingers. They told me they had misgivings about a real figure. I said, "I'll foreshorten him; I'll bunch him up so much so that I'll have all his helium in his rump and his thighs which would be up in the air and his head would be down." I made him a little bit like the animated Spider-Man. I've been given credit as the designer of it and I did come up with the position but Manny Bass was the genius behind it. He gave me all the details on how to keep a balloon afloat and it's still considered one of their best fliers. I'm very proud of that. Although this past Thanksgiving there was a wind problem and he got impaled on a light pole.

PROPORTIONATE STRENGTH OF A SPIDER
SPIDER SIGNAL TO TERRIFY OPPONENTS
WEB SHOOTER DESIGNED BY PETER PARKER
Spider-Man TM & © 1998 Marvel Characters, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
BEST WISHES TO JEFF – JOHN ROMITA
*Preliminary sketches for newspaper strip.*

*I read somewhere that you had painted a model of it first?*
Oh that was a wonderful experience. It was back-breaking but wonderful. They had this wonderful thing rigged up in their warehouse, where you could work on the models of the balloons. I was there, and they rigged it up on a set of wires. They did this plaster cast to specifications, it was about three feet long and two feet wide or so, and it was hanging from these wires and I could move it in any position I wanted. It was amazing. Manny Bass is a genius. I would like to give him as much credit as possible. I was there to give the details to the person who would do the actual pattern of the balloon which would be stitched together. So I went out there to give them the exact line to line details. On this figure I painted it red, then I took a fine line brush and did all the webbing on the entire thing, and I did the pattern on his back, and the emblem of the spider on his chest. It was quite a work of art.

*What happened to the model?*
You know I never pursued it. I don't know who has it now, if it's in Macy's warehouse or what. I don't know *why* I did not pursue it and say, "If you're ever finished with that, let me know. I'll buy it from you." I think I am going to try. I'd love to see it.

*What other unique projects have you worked on?*
One time when we were on Madison Avenue we had a wooden door leading into the Marvel offices, from the elevator. They asked me, and this will show you how much they valued the time of their artists, they

asked me to paint a full-color Spider-Man on the wooden door. They didn't have the sense to say, let's do it as some kind of a transfer on plastic, or have it printed and then cut out and have decals put on the door. But they didn't do it that way, and I'm too stupid to say, "Why don't you do it that way." I went out there and I drew it on the door, painted it in, and I spent the entire day with my back aching doing that on the door and when we left the offices seven or eight years later it was left there. Did I have the sense to say, "Let me have the door?" No. I didn't. I just left it there.

*You also did a comic strip in the 1981 New York Yankees yearbook.*
I did a four-page depiction of Don Larsen's perfect game, and it was in the center spread of the Yankees' yearbook. It was a very proud moment for me. I still have the artwork from that.

*Did you like designing the look of heroes?*
I did get a great satisfaction out of it. For example, there's the time Len Wein came to me and asked me about a character called the Wolverine. I went to the encyclopedia and looked at a picture of a Wolverine.

CONCEIVED BY CARL WIRSHBA
WRITTEN BY MARTY APPEL
ART BY JOHN ROMITA
COLOR BY STAN GOLDBERG
LETTERED BY IRV WATANABE
OCTOBER 8, 1956, 64,519 FANS WERE JAMMING HISTORIC YANKEE STADIUM FOR THE FIFTH GAME OF THE WORLD SERIES. THE YANKEES AND ARCH RIVAL BROOKLYN DODGERS WERE TIED WITH TWO VICTORIES EACH.
AS THE DODGERS FOUGHT TO DEFEND THEIR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP, ALL EYES WOULD BE ON THEIR PITCHER SAL "THE BARBER" MAGLIE, AND HIS MOUND OPPONENT BIG DON LARSEN AN 11-5 HURLER FOR THE YANKS IN THE REGULAR SEASON
*TM & ©1998 NY Yankees. All Rights Reserved.*

Before that, I thought a wolverine was a female wolf. That shows you how well-informed I was. When I saw the description and the drawing in the encyclopedia, all I did was write down a list of distinctive qualities. They were small and ferocious, they had claws, were very belligerent, and very dangerous for their size. What I did was I used the claws and the size, and I wrote down on the original sketch, 5'3" or 5'4". I think I did that myself, but I wouldn't swear to it. But I think that's what I injected into it because of the size of the animal. I used claws as a theme. I had the claws growing out of the back of his hand. I don't believe I had thought of them as retractable, but maybe we had already discussed that. The claws were extensions that came out of the back of his hands, between the wrist and the knuckles. Then I had some claw shapes on his costume. The actual wolverine looked like a cat to me, not a wolf. So I did a catlike set of ears for the character. Later on, others extended the ears to the larger size they are now. I think that was a brilliant addition. The ferocious shapes and all the points, the claws, the musculature, the compact size, and the ferocious snarl on his lips, it was all part of that original half a dozen words I took down from the encyclopedia. I used to do that with every character. I was always a little bit disappointed if I ended up with an animal hide and a human face. I thought that was a cop-out costume.

Then of course the Punisher was my best costume. I figured for sure they were going to come back and say that we needed a mask on him. When I did my first blue pencil drawing, I did him with a skull on his chest. I made an effort to avoid having him look like a previous character from the forties called the Black Terror, who had a skull and crossbones on his chest. That's the first thing I wanted to see, the black costume with a skull. I didn't use the crossbones because I thought that was pirate-like. So I incorporated the skull shape not only on his chest, but on his whole torso. I used the top half of the skull as the whole top of the torso with only a little black to define it. Then I used the teeth of the skull as the belt buckle. Immediately I got the skull look that I needed, I got the black and white theme that I needed, but it didn't look like the Black Terror. I was very pleased and I left the mask off. I thought they would come to me and say, "We've got to hide his identity."

But they never said a word. They took him that way and I was amazed and pleased. Pleased and delighted.

*When you're pencilling a page, how do you approach it?*
Generally, I agonized. To tell you the truth I wish it was more fun and easier for me, like it is for some people, like John Buscema. John would just decide to do it, and he would do it, and do it quickly. Jack Kirby was that way, John Byrne is that way. People like John Byrne not only produce their pages, but they actually enjoy them because there's no agony in it for them. It's always been agony for me. I produced stories and comic books at a great cost to my health of comfort and sleep, and weekend time. Every time I do a book, it's an exhausting toil. And it's sad because I still enjoy it. I enjoy the satisfaction of producing it. But while I'm doing it I'm torturing myself, because it's never good enough for me. I always picture it much better than it comes out. So it is a real chore for me. I can't say that I don't love it. I do love it. But I really dread the process because it's like pulling teeth. It's like I'm yanking my own teeth.

*Did you prefer inking your own pencils?*
I actually did, but I always worried about how much time I was spending. I'd spend the whole time creating the pencils, and then inking it, and I felt it was duplication. But I did enjoy it more because I could achieve the subtleties that I wanted. Sometimes in ink I would do subtle changes and subtle expressions that I couldn't get in pencil. Those of course were always missing if I didn't ink it myself, and I've had some of the best inkers in the business. I probably had three or four of the best inkers of all time, but they still didn't know what I was thinking when I pencilled it. They could never quite capture exactly what I had hoped for. So I couldn't blame them, they did the best they could, and they did very good work. But I always made last-minute adjustments and mini-changes that I could never get if I didn't ink it.

*How full were your pencils?*
A lot of times they were just blue pencils, sometimes fairly comprehensive blue pencils, sometimes they'd be rough, depending on who would ink it. Joe Sinnott could take my rough blue pencils and turn them into finished art, many times. And other guys have done it. Jim Mooney used to work from my rough blue pencils. They would be comprehensive, you could see the expressions, you could see the figures, things like that. But when I did a building generally there were perspective lines, and not a lot of sculpturing and detail. But that was because they would ask me to do something impossible in a short period of time. So I would have guys like Jim Mooney, Don Heck, Frank Giacoia, and Mike Esposito help me. Those guys would end up doing double duty. They would get paid for the extra time, but they would take rough pencils and produce finished art. Then there were times I did very tight pencils.

*When you inked, you would always use a brush?*
I was a brush man. That was one of the main problems with the Steve Ditko style, was that I couldn't do it in brush. When I did *Daredevil* I did it in brush. But when I did *Amazing Spider-Man*, I had to go to a pen because it would not have looked like Ditko. So I forced myself to become a pen man and it's always been a very unnatural approach for me. When I work with a pen, I can do things that I can't with a brush, but it's not me, it doesn't look like me. So my preference is to work with a brush.

*Looking back, was there any one thing when you were at Marvel that really stands out for you?*
Oh gee, I had so many nice moments. Just the satisfaction of seeing characters of mine being brought into the different strips. I enjoyed creating the backgrounds of characters like Robbie Robinson or Mary Jane. I would have loved to have done a series on Mary Jane's childhood, because I had a whole imaginary history of her life too. And those were the types of things that I enjoyed, and I regret I

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didn't have a chance to pursue. So I've got a lot of regrets and enjoyments at the same time. I regret that some of the issues Gil Kane used to do, like the Spider-Man wedding, I could not do. I turned it down, or they may not have even asked me knowing I was too swamped, because I was too busy doing my art director's job. I regret that I didn't make time to do the wedding issue. I regret that I wasn't around to do the death of Aunt May. So I have a lot of regrets, all because of my own lack of speed, that I couldn't do, but I should have done. And all those other issues that I should have done but other people had to fill in on.

*One of the enjoyments I would have to assume would have been having the opportunity to work with your son.*

Those were wonderful, wonderful moments. It's interesting, everybody says they think he draws like me, and he says he's trying to draw like me, and yet I find such an individuality in his work. When I work on his pencils, I labor, and try not to overpower it because I had a history of overpowering anybody that I inked. I tried to keep his personality in it. Sometimes I did and sometimes I didn't. His stuff is so on the money, he's a great combination of a human interest artist which I am, and then he adds this great dimension of design and storytelling that's so wonderful that when I'm working on it I'm almost giddy. I wish I had the energy to work on a monthly feature with him. If I had any kind of guts at all I would take on a monthly feature and just ink it. But I don't. *(laughs)*

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*Do you have any projects in the works now with your son?*

Well, we always talk about working on projects ourselves, and there was a time when . . .well, you know it's like dancing on your own grave, you almost wish there would be a slump, or a reason for you to do something that you always wanted to do. In other words, I don't want to wish it on anybody that we'd be out of work for about six months so that we could work on a project together. We have plots that we thrashed out that are eighteen years old. And we always say, "Wouldn't it be nice to do that story now, and just do it as a one-shot." It's like mixed emotions, you don't want to wish anyone bad luck, but if only you had the time. So yes, I love working on his stuff.

*What have you been working on recently?*

I did a one-shot Spider-Man story last year with Stan. Along with Spider-Man it featured King Pin and Daredevil. That book was received rather well. Doing that was a lot of fun. It was like the strip; it was mixed emotions. It was fun, but it was hard work. I lost an entire summer, which was the first full summer of my retirement. I sort of took it away from Virginia and I still owe her. I did a sixteen page depiction of before Peter Parker was born with his parents being agents for the CIA. It was in the *Untold Tales of Spider-Man -1* which Roger Stern wrote. I'm about to start on a cyber comic. Stan and I are going to work on it together and it'll appear online on

Marvel Zone. We're just in the planning stages. We know it's not going to be a superhero. I think it will be well received by people who like Marvel storytelling. I like getting into this twenty-first century approach.

*Your wife worked at Marvel also?*
Yes, for twenty years.

*At one point, she was Jim Shooter's secretary?*
She was his executive secretary and really his assistant because she was practically running the office at the time. She was Traffic Manager after that. She got us on schedule for the first time in history, which is a great accomplishment. Then she became production manager. This was a woman who had never done any production work in her life. But she was the executive bullet to do it because she got that production department humming. She had a wonderful run there. When we retired there was more comment on losing her than losing me. I actually had to drag her out when we retired. She didn't want to leave. We're both enjoying retirement. She thought she would have nothing to do, but no, we're full of life and having fun.

I've got to tell you, I've known a lot of married people in comics. Maybe a dozen failed marriages.

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John Romita issue of *Marvel Age*.

The comic business is very hard because you work long hours. I will tell you the flat rule is, if you don't have the right woman, you're in trouble. One of the things that contributed to my ability to do this job for fifty years, was the fact that for the forty-five years we've been married, Virginia could have made a lot of demands on me that I was not able to give her. But she was patient, she was forbearing, and she contributed. Many times she erased pages for me, she filled in blacks, she was patient on just plain standard things. She didn't make demands. I couldn't have done it if I'd had a different kind of wife. I probably would have been like a lot of my colleagues, and been in a second or third marriage by now. So I think it's very important. I always tell young comic artists, if you're going to meet a girl, you'd better be sure she can take it. Because anybody who works seven days a week for long stretches at a time, through the night many times, needs a very understanding wife. Everybody mentions how Jack Kirby's wife was his most important asset, and in fact part of his talent. I think that's true of most comic artist's wives. Roz Kirby made Jack a more productive guy, and Virginia was that way with me too. I could not have produced anything at all without her. ❖

*John was telling us that you knew each other ever since you were children.*
Ever since we were nine years old. We lived in the same building. I lived on the upper floor and he lived down below.

*What were your thoughts the first time he said to you, "I'm going to be doing comic books for a while."*
Well, it was a way to make a living. It was that simple. I didn't attach anything to it, it was always supposed to be a temporary thing. He used to do paintings. It's hard to say what I expected of him in those days. I was just happy to be married to him.

*You worked at Marvel for about twenty years. Did you have much contact with your husband while you were working there?*
Well he worked with Sol Brodsky at that time. So we went to lunch together. We went into the office together and returned home together. We didn't actually work together until after Jim Shooter left. He was doing one job, and I was doing another. He was Art Director and I was Traffic Manager.

*When you both retired, who do you think Marvel missed more, you or him?*
*(laughs)* He's still working with them! You know, when you leave someplace, people miss you. But a month later, they've gotten used to it.

*Of the work your husband has done, is there anything that you are particularly fond of?*
He did so many nice things that I'm proud of. How could I be proud of one thing, when there were just so many? Each one would seem like this one is the best. I am just so proud of everything he does, even now. I couldn't pick out any one thing in particular — except the one he did with me on the cover [*Marvel Age* #111]. *(laughs)*

*What were your thoughts when it looked like your son would also be going into the comic book business?*
Oh it scared me. I thought, "My God, if the company goes out of business, there are going to be three people in the family out of a job." But that was it. I wanted him to be an immediate success, but it didn't come easy for him. John Sr. was so strict. He was very hard on John Jr. If the work was not good enough, he wouldn't say, "Well, that's good enough." I'd ask, "Can't you cut him a little slack?" He wouldn't. Not even a little bit. But, when he was pleased with what he did, there wasn't enough praise he could give his son. John Sr. really was truly proud of his progress.

"I am just so proud of everything he does." ❖

*Was it difficult on you when he worked all those long hours, and worked all night?*
I don't know. I was just happy to have him around. It wasn't really difficult. I mean, I suppose it's attitude. A lot of the wives today expect a lot more from their husbands. I come from a time where my role was to do for him. It was never a question of what are you doing for me? So I never really felt upset at things we didn't do, places we didn't go to. When you had to make a living, you had to make a living. We are children of the depression. Making a living was important so the sacrifices involved were accepted. I was glad to have him around. We were together. We did things together. What we didn't do . . . well, a lot of people don't get to do everything they want. I have no regrets. None at all. He's been great. I hope he is as happy with me as I am with him.

*We've gotten that impression.*
Well I'm happy to hear that. ❖

# John Romita, Jr.

STAN LEE PRESENTS THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN IN...
CONFESSIONS!
HE'S BEEN BLASTED, GASSED, AND BEATEN BY THE MYSTERIOUS HOBGOBLIN. AND NOW, BEREFT OF HIS WARNING SPIDER-SENSES, SPIDER-MAN SUDDENLY FINDS HIMSELF SURROUNDED BY AN ANGRY MOB--
-- OF MULTI-MILLIONAIRE BUSINESSMEN!
POSSIBLY THE BEST ISSUE OF SPIDER-MAN EVER! WHAT BETTER WAY TO CELEBRATE OUR 250th ISSUE?!
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*Amazing Spider-Man* #250. John Romita, Jr. pencils, Klaus Janson inks.

*Growing up, you obviously knew your Dad was a comic book artist. At what point did that make an impact on you?*
It was *Daredevil* #12, and I was seven or eight years old. That was the first issue that really hit me like a sledgehammer. My dad had only been doing romance comics up till that point, and then all of a sudden I saw him working on the cover to *Daredevil* #12 with Ka-Zar on it, and I remember that was the turning point for me, and suddenly it was all important.

*Were you a comic book fan before that?*
No. I may have looked at a couple that he brought home, but it wasn't a big deal to me, and suddenly it became a big deal when I saw the *Daredevil* cover.

*Did you talk plots out with your Dad and help him?*
He says I did. But mostly it was my brother and him, I would just stick my two cents in every so often. He would bounce it off the whole family. My brother and I obviously had a penchant towards that kind of stuff. Sometimes we would walk in on him and he would have his head in his hands, and you could tell he wouldn't know what to do. So we would ask him, "What can we do? What's going on?" We always tried to help. I stuck with it, and my brother found more important things to do. Then when I was thirteen I created that character, "The Prowler" and they used the name, but they didn't use the character. My dad's work was around me all the time so I couldn't help sticking my nose into it.

*At what point did you decide that this was something you might like to do for a living?*
When I broke my leg in a car accident and lost my construction job. I realized I had nothing else I could do. I think I already had the idea of being an artist in mind, but I wasn't sure if I was going to do it for a living, forever and ever. So I decided to do something with it, and it just kept on growing. It was almost as if it was out of my hands. Now it's twenty-one years later.

*You've worked with your Dad several projects. Do you have a favorite?*
I remember the biggest thrill was doing the *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #16 featuring the female Captain Marvel. My father inked the whole thing, and I remember as a very very young man thinking, "This is it. I've got my father inking this, and it's a major character." I think that was the biggest thrill because it was one of the first times he inked my pencils. Other than that, for quality's sake, I think it was the Hobgoblin issue. We had worked on that character from its inception.

*What would you say has been your Dad's biggest contribution to the industry?*
Artwork-wise?

# *john*

> "He's a better artist than anybody and everybody in the business."
>
> ❖

*Anything.*
I think it's his ambition. I think he's got more ambition art-wise; I think he cares more than most people. He's a better artist than anybody in the business has ever seen. He's never shown anybody his true talent. He was doing things at eighteen and nineteen that guys can't do now. He's a better artist than anybody and everybody in the business. He just never showed his stuff off to anybody. I think it's his overall talent that has been rubbed onto many young guys, me included, just by learning from him. I think it's his overall quality as an artist, not just as a comic book artist.

*What was the one thing that he taught you, either directly or indirectly that you feel was the most important?*
Storytelling. Definitely. It was the subtle things that he passed on to me. Art techniques you could pick up through repetition and general learning. The quality storytelling mindset he passed on. That I think is a special quality. ❖

# ROMITA'S RAIDERS

Jim Shooter

*John credits you with the Romita's Raiders program.*
Yes. Well, I guess that was my idea.

*Where did that idea come from?*
Well, what would drive me crazy, as Editor-in-Chief, is I'd go in to see John and I'd have something important I needed to talk to him about, and he'd be sitting there ruling lines in a background because some editor had a problem with some panel and he'd have to fix it. And since he didn't have any assistants, he's ruling lines. And I said, "That's dumb. Isn't there some kid out there desperate to learn how to be an inker, that would love to be John Romita's background man? To have the opportunity to sit right here beside John Romita and learn stuff everyday." So we talked about it, and I said, "I'm going to do this. We're going to open it up and get kids in here from all over the country. We'll get half a dozen kids, they'll do all the grunt work, and we'll pay them minimum wage. But, they'll be sitting there when Walt Simonson walks by, and they could say, 'Hey Walt, could you look at my drawing and tell me what you think?' And for that privilege, every kid in America is going to want to be a part of it." John kept saying, "No, kids from out of town, where are they going to stay? This is New York . . . No one will want it." Well, we were swamped with people wanting to get into the program. We were just inundated with people. The trouble was, I don't know if it saved John a whole lot of time, because the kids did all the ruling and work like that, but John spent so much time teaching them their skills. I think he actually lost time on the deal.

John was a great teacher. He was so good for those guys. Plus it was good to have them [Romita's Raiders] there, they were terrific. He was terrific to them, and they did a good job. And a lot of them turned out to be real artists. There were a lot of guys who came out of that little program. Their names turned up later as big time artists. It was one of the best things we ever did. I guess I get the credit for the idea, but John was a guru to those kids. It was a really good thing for us to do.

*So you would say then that it was the success you hoped it would be?*
No. It was *way* better than I ever thought it would be. Too many times in comics old pros don't get a chance to pass on what they know, for a lot of reasons, and a lot of knowledge is lost. Then people have to start from scratch and learn it all over again. That little program, I think, got a lot of people on the right track. It was a priceless education for a lot of people. He was the right man for the right job, too. John is just a wonderful teacher, he's wonderful working with kids. Will Eisner is a genius, and he thinks everybody should be. So he'll tell you stuff that works for geniuses, but not real good for you. John's a genius too, but he's used to teaching kids. Basically he will talk to them, and give them little steps. Or say, "here's a rule for you to follow, not forever, just for now." They make *so* much progress with him, so quickly. I think he's a really good teacher. He has a unique skill with young people.

# ROMITA'S RAIDERS ROLLCALL

The following is a list of the Romita's Raiders listed in the order in which they entered the program.

KEITH WILLIAMS
STEVE GEIGER
PHIL LORD
DON DRAKE
JAMES FRY
BRAD JOYCE
TOM MORGAN
MARK MCKENNA
KEVIN MCGUIRE
MARK ALEXANDER
JOSE MARZAN, JR.
BRUCE SOLOTOFF
DONALD HUDSON
CHRIS IVY
RODNEY RAMOS

ANDRE COATES
GAVIN CURTIS
VINCE MIELCAREK
JAMES BROCK
BRAD VAN CATTA
MICKEY RITTER
JOE ROSAS
BOB PETRECCA
BUD LAROSA
KEVIN TINSLEY
JOSE ZULUETA
JOHN KALISZ
SCOTT KOLINS
FRANK PERCY

RAY KRYSSING
BILL WYLIE
KRIS RENKEWITZ
SCOTT KOBLISH
JIM REDDINGTON
YANCY LABAT
DELAYNE HAWKINS
SCOTT ELMER
RICH PEROTTA
PIERRE JACKSON
BRIAN MOYER
GINO DECICCO
WAYNE MURRAY
LORETTA KROLL

## John Romita

*How did the Romita's Raiders program begin?*
We instituted the art apprentice program [Romita's Raiders] soon after I became the Executive Art Director. That was very satisfying, and a great thing to do because I was bringing artists along that needed a little bit of polish. Guys who were pretty good in their own right, but they needed a little bit of work here and there. They would work for about six months to a year as a Raider and they would get work when they left, sometimes from DC, sometimes from underground publishers, and sometimes from Marvel. I think there were about thirty-five Raiders that went through there in ten years. I think you got about twenty-five or so artists that ended up helping us or the industry. I was very proud of that. A lot of the credit for the program goes to Jim Shooter. He was the brains behind that. It was a brilliant idea. It was based upon the years when people used to say, "I'll work for nothing if you let me come up to the office. I'll be a gopher, I'll do anything you want." So Shooter said, "Let's take them up on that. We'll develop artists and they'll get a chance at the business. If they're no good they'll just go away." The idea was brilliant. He added the wrinkle of minimum wage, so at least their subway fare was paid for. It was a real hardship on a lot of them. Some of them had families and they were really sacrificing to do it. They were really under the gun to learn, otherwise they were wasting their money and time.

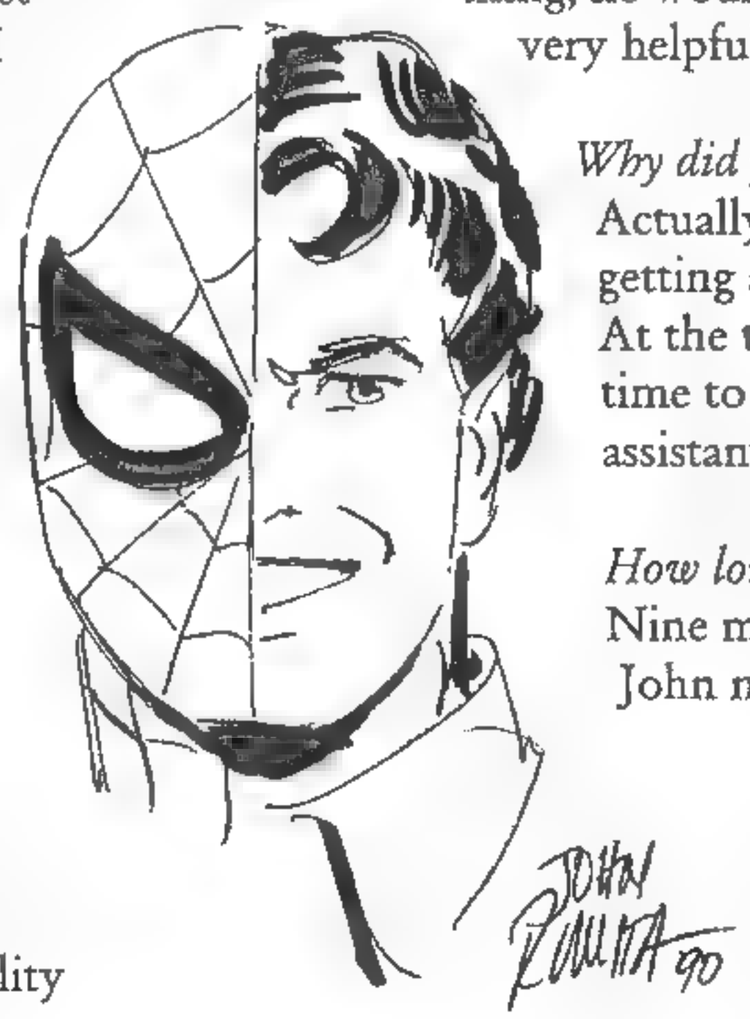
*Has the program stopped?*
Yes. I think the program has been discontinued. When Marvel laid off a large portion of their staff in the second wave of layoffs they let go of the Raiders. I kept telling them that since they were working for minimum wage, they would probably be the last to go. But they let those guys go during the second wave of layoffs and it was very frustrating. It was really less important for them to be laid off because they were really in transition and in a learning period as opposed to those who were laid off that were in permanent positions. But it made less sense to let the Raiders go because they were only making $4.25 an hour.

ROMITA'S RAIDERS

# KEITH WILLIAMS

*You were the first person to take part in Marvel's apprentice program?*
That's right. I think I did it for about a year.

*How did that come about?*
Actually I started as a background artist, working on *Spectacular Spider-Man* and some other different books. I heard about the apprentice program when they first decided to start it, and I just went into the office and said, "Can I be in it?" Fortunately I was able to talk them into it. I loved John's work, and he's a really great guy, so I figured I'd learn a lot from him.




*What is it about his work that you love?*
Even though it's comics, it has a realism to it, maybe even a little more gritty than some of the other guys out there at the time. I just loved the way he drew Mary Jane and Gwen Stacy. I also loved his Daredevil. I loved the feel of his cities. Everything had a realistic quality to it.

*What were some of the things that you learned from John?*
Actually, I learned inking from him. I was doing backgrounds before I became an apprentice with him. He taught me the basics of inking, how to correct things, not to be afraid to work with inks. I was initially working on being a penciller. I was deathly afraid of inks. But I found out that my calling was more into inking and John showed me the way.

In the program, John was basically teaching us everything, including pencilling and inking. After a while we became a working part of Marvel so he was basically teaching us on the fly how to do certain things, like correcting artwork and basic anatomy and regular pencilling and inking. That's basically what he was doing for us. I kept all those skills with me.

*What was it like working with John?*
It was great. You could ask him any question and he would answer it and if he wasn't sure about something, he would find out about it. He was always very helpful to me.

*Why did you leave the program?*
Actually, it was very funny. I ended up getting a job as an assistant editor at Marvel. At the time, I was probably thinking it was time to move on. I figured that becoming an assistant editor was a good opportunity.

*How long were you an assistant editor?*
Nine months. But I always went back if John needed help. For all the years I've known John, I was always amazed how he could handle all the work that went through the office. He had all the apprentices that he worked with, all the others in the office he worked with, plus he worked on covers, designing them, and sometimes fixing them; I just don't know how he was able to do all that. He's an incredible person. He always had a lot of patience. I wish I could have been like that. I would probably still be there if I was.

*Is there any one thing that stands out as the ultimate John Romita for you?*
His Spider-Man. Absolutely. That was the basis of the character after he'd finished the run on it. The way he would draw Peter Parker, or Mary Jane or Gwen Stacy became a standard reference for others to look back to. He had such a strong way of drawing his characters. ❖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PRO FILES

# CHRIS IVY

*How did you first learn of the art apprentice program and what were the events that lead up to you becoming part of the program?*
I got involved in the Art Apprentice program back in 1987 as result of my first attempts at getting freelance work. Fresh out of art college, I sent pencil and ink samples to the submissions editor at the time and got a call back from John's "right hand" in the program, Don Perlin, about working as a "Raider." After the initial disappointment of being turned down for the freelance work I was aiming for, Don (and later John) persuaded me to take a position under them. I soon realized how truly fortunate I was to say "yes" to their offer.

*What was the experience like?*
That first year working in the bullpen under John and the several years following as a frequently-visiting freelancer were about the best years in my life. The "family-like" atmosphere of the Marvel bullpen I had always heard of was also a big factor. John and his wife, Virginia— acting as "parents" to the "Raiders" and other members of the bullpen— were largely responsible for that. I learned more about my craft in 12 months (the duration of the apprenticeship) from John and Don than I did in a full 5 years of schooling.

*What was the most important thing you learned while being a part of the program?*
From day one, I and the two Raiders working with me at the time, Don Hudson and Rodney Ramos, reported to John and Don Perlin directly. All of our work (in the form of art corrections of any kind in the interior pages of a given title) was given to us always with some words of wisdom. That's where all my knowledge of the craft of cartooning came from. Both John and Don, as busy as they were, always had the time to teach us something new. John was responsible for the fixes on the covers of the whole Marvel line, and I considered it a "right of passage" that he allowed all three of us to be in on a few of those cover corrections towards the end of our apprenticeship.

*How long were you a "Raider"?*
John thought it would be smart to keep the internships for the "Raiders" in 12 month rotations to give as many of us "newbies" a chance at stardom. But, on par with his personality, he actually allowed all of us to stay well past that. I was there from May '87 to October '88, when I had accrued so much freelance work that I couldn't stay on if I wanted to. We were replaced by the likes of inker Bud Larosa, and colorists John Kalisz and Joe Rosas to name a few.

*What was it like to work with John Romita?*
Of all of the people I had a pleasure of meeting at Marvel at the time, John was far and away the most decent, respectful, and genuine person (as well as artist) I met. For all of his knowledge and experience he never once made any of us feel intimidated. For what little time he had in his busy schedule he always had time to answer any questions and give advice. A true gentleman. ❖

Peter Parker *TM & © 1998 Marvel Characters, Inc. All Rights Reserved.*

Panel from unused penciled page from *Amazing Spider-Man* #45.

ROMITA'S RAIDERS

# JOSE MARZAN JR.

*You were involved in the program for about two months from July 1986 to Sept. 1986?*
That's about right. I also worked for John on an "on-call" and part-time basis from '86-88. At least those are the dates I seem to remember more or less.

*How did you first learn of the art apprentice program and what were the events that lead up to you becoming part of the program?*
I was an intern at Marvel in 1983, and was always hanging around the offices after that, doing background work, showing samples, etc. I knew that the apprentice program existed from the beginning. I had always shown John my work for him to critique, and then one day he asked if I was interested in joining the apprentice program. I had to turn him down since I was about to start college full time when he asked. I can't remember how we came to decide on my working during the summer, and on an on-call and part-time basis. He must have been in a bind somehow and asked if I could give him a couple of hours, which led to another couple of hours, and so on, and so on.

*What was the experience like?*
It was great. When you're young it's great to work as part of a team, and when your boss is John it only gets better. He doesn't dictate what he wants, he leads you and teaches you why things work and why they don't. It was great.

*What was the most important thing you learned while being a part of the program?*
I learned many technical things, but more important was learning a sense of professionalism and attention to detail that John instilled in me. It's important to get things done on time, but you shouldn't slack off the quality of your work in getting it done. That means making sure your drawing is accurate, in regards to light sources and accuracy in references (cars, guns, buildings. etc.).

*How much interaction, did you have with John Romita and what was that like?*
I interacted with John all the time. If a small art correction would come in from an editor, we Raiders would go ahead and do it without consulting John. If it was more complex we would talk it over with John, and see what his ideas were. On occasions he would layout, or pencil the correction himself. He was always willing to talk over anything, whether it was work related, sample related or in my case just talk about old movies. Very rarely was John too busy to talk with us guys.

*Are there any anecdotes about that time that stick with you to this day that you could share with us?*
There are a few that I remember. The one that comes to mind is not as much work related. John and I are early birds. That is we always arrived at the office at about the same time, around 8:30 AM- 8:45 AM. So I would ask John if he could look at my samples before the work day started. "Sure, bring them in," he would say. Well, a 15-20 minute critique would turn into a 45 minute critique, with editors starting to come in and sometimes having to wait before they could ask for corrections. I suppose if no editors would come by John would keep critiquing. He's quite tough and thorough I must say. But I never left in tears.

*Why did you leave the program?*
I don't remember a day that I walked in and told John I couldn't work for him anymore, since I was part-time, I just drifted off. In 1988, I finished college and starting getting inking work on my own, so the program had provided what I had wanted. Full freelance work was what I wanted in the long run, so as more freelance work would come in, I would spend less time working for John. ❖

PRO FILES

# GRAHAM NOLAN

*How did John Romita influence you?*
Well, when I first started reading comics John Romita was one of my favorites. His covers just blew me away. His work on Spider-Man and Captain America was amazing. All the men were heroically handsome; all the women were really good looking. He used great placement of blacks, really open lines with some bold inking. I love all that.

*How would you assess his storytelling ability?*
His storytelling is great. Romita's work . . . what made it sing for me the most was the fact that he made you care about the people. Some of my favorite material in *Amazing Spider-Man* was the soap opera stuff, when Spider-Man wasn't even in it. He really made you care about Gwen Stacy and Mary Jane. He made you realize they were different. Gwen Stacy carries herself differently than Mary Jane. It wasn't just drawing the same pretty girl with different hair. They had different characteristics.

*Kingpin TM & ©1998 Marvel Characters, Inc. All Rights Reserved.*
Graham Nolan's take on the Kingpin

*When were you first reading comics? In the seventies?*
I was probably reading them earlier than that, in the late sixties. I liked reading them, but I wasn't really into collecting them until the early to mid-seventies.

*So really the first Spider-Man you saw was Romita's Spider-Man?*
Yeah. The first *Amazing Spider-Man* I remember buying on my own was Spidey #134, the first appearance of the Tarantula and a Romita cover. That's why I picked it up, because the cover grabbed me.

*When you did the Spider-Man/Batman team-up last year, did you go back and look at some of Romita's Spider-Man?*
Oh absolutely. I think I captured some of his Spider-Man, but there's a lot of places where I missed, mostly in the Spider-Man mask. I just felt like I didn't get it down yet. By the end of the issue I felt that I was kind of getting it down, but I felt that the Kingpin was the one character that I got down. I wanted him to have that Romita feel to him. Kingpin is supposed to be this big huge burly guy, with proportions that nobody could have, with hands bigger than his head. ❖

# STEPHEN D. SULLIVAN

*What is it about John's work that influenced you?*
What influenced me most about Romita's work is the sheer beauty of it. Like many people, what first attracted my attention was his women. They were gorgeous. Later, I came to realize that he drew everything equally well. Men, animals, buildings, the works. Everything he draws, he draws well and draws right. No goofy anatomy. No fake cars. No bungled buildings. Amazing.

The amazing thing is that he did it all with very few lines. In fact, if there was an extra line in any Romita drawing, I don't think I've seen it. I've tried to incorporate his dynamic simplicity in my own work — but I'm afraid I'm not nearly as good on most things I do. My people, however, are pretty good. I learned to draw hands and feet from Ditko, but women's hands from Romita.

*What do you feel is John's strongest point as an artist?*
I think Romita's strongest suits are storytelling, beauty, and simplicity of line. His work is so direct, it's almost invisible to the story he's telling. Or, it would be if his stuff, especially his women, weren't so darn good looking!

*Of the projects, John has done do you have a favorite and if so what is it and why?*
My favorite Romita project remains his long run on Spider-Man. His work on Captain America would probably place second with me. However, I'm sure I'm overlooking something that I really loved. I've picked up a lot of comics over the years just because he drew them. Usually I only follow writers that way.

Heck, as a teenager I even tried a romance comic or two featuring his work! This at the height of the "Ugh! Girl comics!" phase. ❖

# MIKE BURKEY

*How did you become interested in collecting John Romita's Spider-Man artwork?*
I really liked the Spider-Man cartoons from the 60's. Also, it was my favorite comic book to read.

When I first started collecting artwork in '89, '90, Ditko's artwork was six to nine hundred dollars per page, and Romita's was going for forty to fifty dollars per page. So, I could get fifteen Romita's per one Ditko. At the time people were telling me, "Are you crazy? Romita's never going to be worth anything. There's too much Romita out there." I was able to amass a lot of it quickly. So now there's not much of his work out there anymore.

It's fun trying to hunt for his artwork. You know you can never get it all, it's like being an archeologist because you know it's out there. You've just got to find it. That's half the fun of collecting it. I'd love one day to be able to display it all. I like for people to enjoy the artwork. I've had people call me up and say that a certain story was their favorite of all time and I've made copies of the pages and sent it to them.

*continued on next page*

*How many John Romita pieces do you have?*
Total pieces is roughly fifteen hundred. That's including strips and published pages and specialty pieces.

*Where do you keep them?*
In a safe. It's bigger than my refrigerator.

*Do you have a favorite piece?*
My favorite general piece would be the complete book of Spidey #121. That issue was the death of Gwen Stacy issue. But my favorite single piece is the splash page to *Amazing Spider-Man* #39. It's a shot of the Goblin and he's throwing a paper with Spider-Man on the front of the paper.

*Is there one thing of Romita's that you really want, but haven't been able to get?*
Well, my ultimate goal is to get one page from every book he did. I'm eleven short from issues #39 to #125. I have a couple complete books around the issues I don't have, so I'm assuming that the ones I don't have are also complete books. But the single piece I'm really trying to get right now a good friend of mine has. It is the Mary Jane page [first time Mary Jane's face appears], the last page to *Amazing Spider-Man* #42. I've offered him over $3000 for it, but he's not interested. There's no Spider-Man in it at all, but I think that page is such a historic and remembered page, I would love to have it. It's agreed that whenever he parts with it, it would go to me. Although I keep trying to find stuff for him, so that I could trade for it.

*What else do you collect?*
I also collect other Spider-Man artists, all the way up to McFarlane. I have about 650 post-Romita pages, between #125 to #297.

*You've since become friends with John Romita?*
Oh sure, yeah. I talk to him often on the phone and he tells me some awesome stories about past history at Marvel. He tells the most fantastic stories. Half the fun of collecting his artwork is he's such a nice guy. He's so nice, I don't think he's ever not had a smile on his face. He's always so nice to everybody at conventions. ❖

## MIKE PASCALE

*How did you first meet John Romita?*
Meeting John Romita was the source of one of the greatest joys — and biggest regrets — of my childhood.

It was during the summer of 1977 when I was 13. We were taking our family vacation, via station wagon, to New York City. I asked my Dad to take me to the Marvel Comics offices. Since he's an artist and a former comic fan, no problem. We're greeted by a really tall, young editor named Jim Shooter. He tells us Stan is in Hollywood doing some movie/TV thing and that Jack has lived out there for some time. I'm deeply disappointed — but still happy to be there, getting a tour of the office, complete with superhero-covered walls and free comics.

Mr. Shooter takes us to an office and says, "This is our Art Director, John Romita."
I quietly *freak*. There he is, the guy whose inspiring, beautifully-slick work on Cap and Spidey always brought joy to my heart and awe to my senses. I notice he's putting the finishing touches on a cover painting for Stan's

*continued on next page*

next book, *The Superhero Women*. Imagine being in the throes of puberty and gazing at all those richly-colored, sensually-drawn Romita women. I felt like I was in the comic-book equivalent of Hef's mansion. *Hoo hah!*

He greeted us with a kind smile and firm handshake. After making small talk (and oohing and ahhing), my Dad whispered to me to show Mr. Romita my "stuff." Y'see, I had begun "self-publishing" a year-and-a-half earlier, making my own comics that my Dad would photocopy at work, which I would then sell at school and local comics conventions for 10-15 cents each. So I brought a few with me, along with some favorite drawings. How great to get some advice and a boost from a real Marvel artist!

So there's my Dad, encouraging as always, proudly waiting for me to display my budding talents for the Marvel legend. Only problem was, I was too shy. Then, as now, my low self-esteem was exceeded only by my lack of confidence. I shook my head silently, not wanting to embarrass myself by showing my crappy kid scribblings to this Artistic Giant who made magic on the comic page. My Dad put his arm around me in loving reassurance and persisted, saying that Mr. Romita would be happy to look at my work, but I kept whispering "No" until tears welled up in my eyes. What an idiot! I think I stammered some lame excuse, and my Dad shrugged his shoulders and the Marvel Art Director smiled and we went on our way. (Dad kept trying to get me to go back but I was too embarrassed and petrified.)

Needless to say, John was an absolute gentleman; friendly, warm and genuinely fatherly. I've regretted that moment ever since.

Skip ahead ten years to the Chicago Comicon. I'm out of college, in advertising, but trying to break into comics. Standing in line at the Marvel booth to show my portfolio to Jim Shooter, no less! I notice the guy next to him is — of course — John Romita! What's he doing? Offering free sketches to the fans. (FREE!) The fanboy in me is *dying* to ask for one, but the would-be "pro" is telling me, "it wouldn't be appropriate." Then I realize, here's my chance! I have my portfolio, he's alone — here's my golden opportunity to make up for the childish screw-up that had bugged me for the last decade! I can finally show my work to the great John Romita and possibly get some encouragement from one of Marvel's greatest artists! What a break!

But I didn't.

I was next in line for Shooter, and by the time I fought my insecurities and mustered up enough courage to even speak to John, it was my turn. I didn't want to miss my chance to get "in," and so I showed my book to Shooter, who basically told me to keep working at it. (*sigh.*) Mr. Romita might've glanced over at us once or twice, but I was too nervous to say anything and have since mercifully blocked out the details. By the time I was done, a few fans had gathered and John was busily sketching.

I blew it again.

On the good side, I'm just glad I got to meet that wonderful artist and storyteller, and even get his autograph (he signed my Spidey #41 at that inaugural meeting). Not only is John Romita the Artist one of the best and most individual of Marvel's Silver Age (you can tell his style a mile away — he's no "clone!"), but John Romita the Man was one of the most pleasant, easy-going, affable folks I've ever met in this often ridiculous business. He's right up there with Jack Kirby on the personality meter, and that's the highest praise one can give.

Who knows? Maybe the next time I see him at a show I'll have the *cojones* to show him my stuff. But I doubt it.

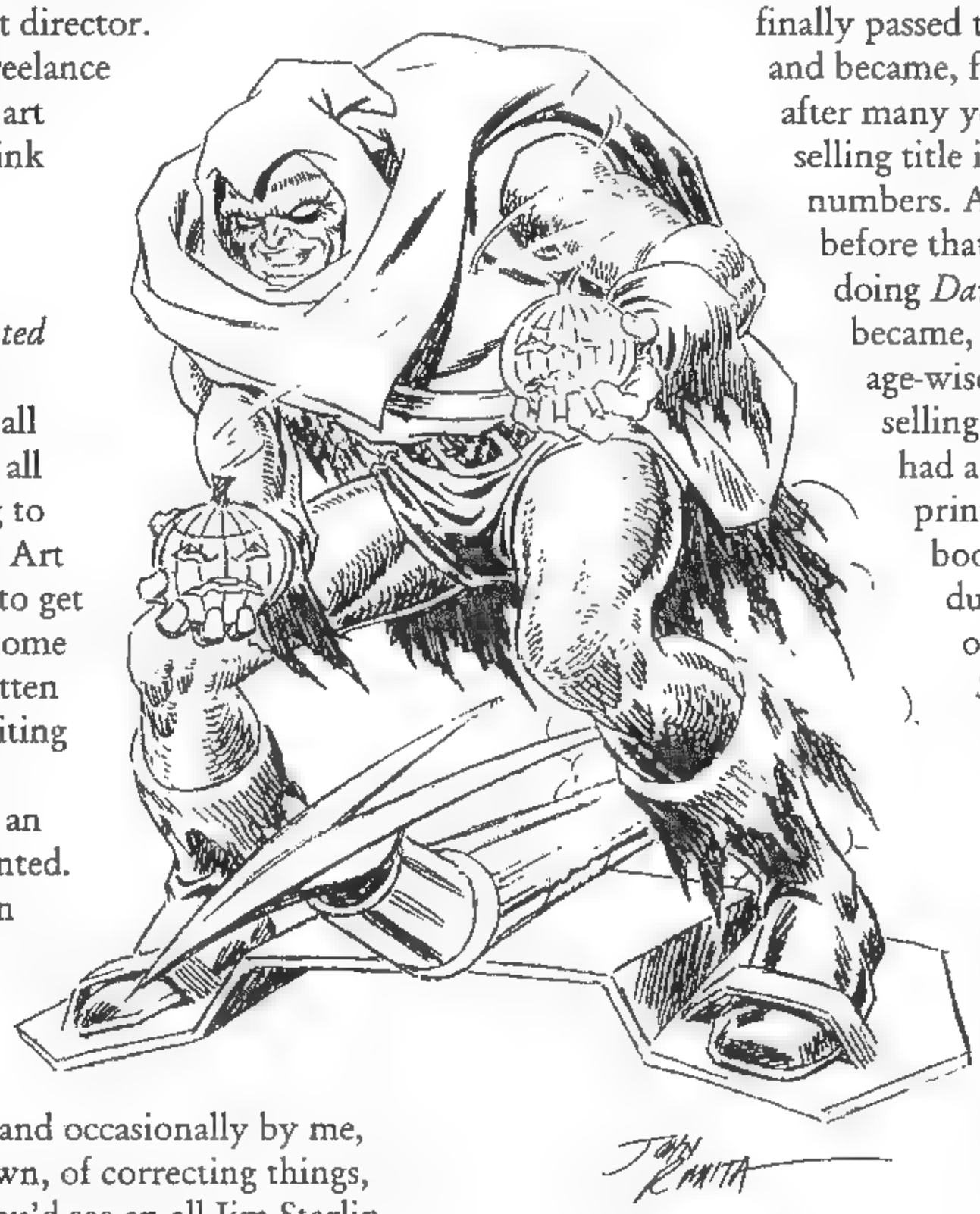
Thanks again, Mr. Romita — for helping to make my childhood the happiest part of my so-called life. You're one of the good ones. ❖

*You worked with John only once, is that right?*
We worked together a lot as far as me as associate editor and later as Editor-in-Chief, and with him first as the Spider-Man artist, and sort of informal art director and later as Art Director. So we worked together off and on for over a decade. But as far as writing actual stories, it was one three or four page Satana story in a *Vampire Tales.* We wanted to get something together real fast with Satana because Stan wanted to have that name in a book right away. I hadn't worked with John so we thought we'd do that story real fast and get it in there.

*Were you the Editor-in-Chief at the time he was Art Director?*
Yes. He was more or less the second person to have that title after Stan became publisher. Frank Giacoia had been assistant art director. When Frank went back to freelance inking, Stan appointed John art director, although I don't think he had the title right away.

*How did things change at Marvel when John was appointed the art director officially?*
They didn't change much at all because he had been doing it all along. John was never trying to assert himself in a big way as Art Director. His thing was just to get things done and work with some of the new guys. As I had gotten to know Stan in terms of writing stories and what he wanted, John had a really nice feel in an artistic way of what Stan wanted. As a result, he was the person who would know if Stan wasn't going to like a particular pose, or face. John got in the habit, sometimes directed by Stan, and occasionally by me, and quite often just on his own, of correcting things, especially faces on covers. You'd see an all Jim Starlin cover with a John Romita face. Basically, he was very good at anticipating what Stan wanted, and as a result it worked out very well, and he stayed on as Art Director far longer than I could have.

*What would you say was John Romita's biggest contribution to Marvel?*
Well there were two. One was providing that kind of artistic presence that you would go to to solve a problem. He could draw so well he could help anybody. He certainly had a style that was influenced by Jack Kirby with a big helping of Milton Caniff. Because it was not an obtrusive style, the casual fan would not notice right away that this head didn't fit this body. Jim Starlin might notice, but the average reader did not. The Romita faces looked like what the faces looked like at Marvel. He had a cohesive artistic presence that could bring things together. His first real contribution to Marvel was to make *Amazing Spider-Man* Marvel's best-seller. It had been Marvel's second-highest seller, but it was really a few issues after John took it over that the book finally passed the *Fantastic Four* and became, for the first time after many years, Marvel's top-selling title in terms of actual numbers. Although even before that, when he was doing *Daredevil*, that book became, I think, percentage-wise Marvel's best-selling book, although it had a much smaller print run than other books. John just had during this period, on *Daredevil* and *Spider-Man*, a sort of golden touch. Everything he did sold well. Even when he just did the covers, some of the best-selling Conan books were the ones when he would come in and do a cover or two, even if somebody else did the interiors. He just had that kind of golden touch. ❖

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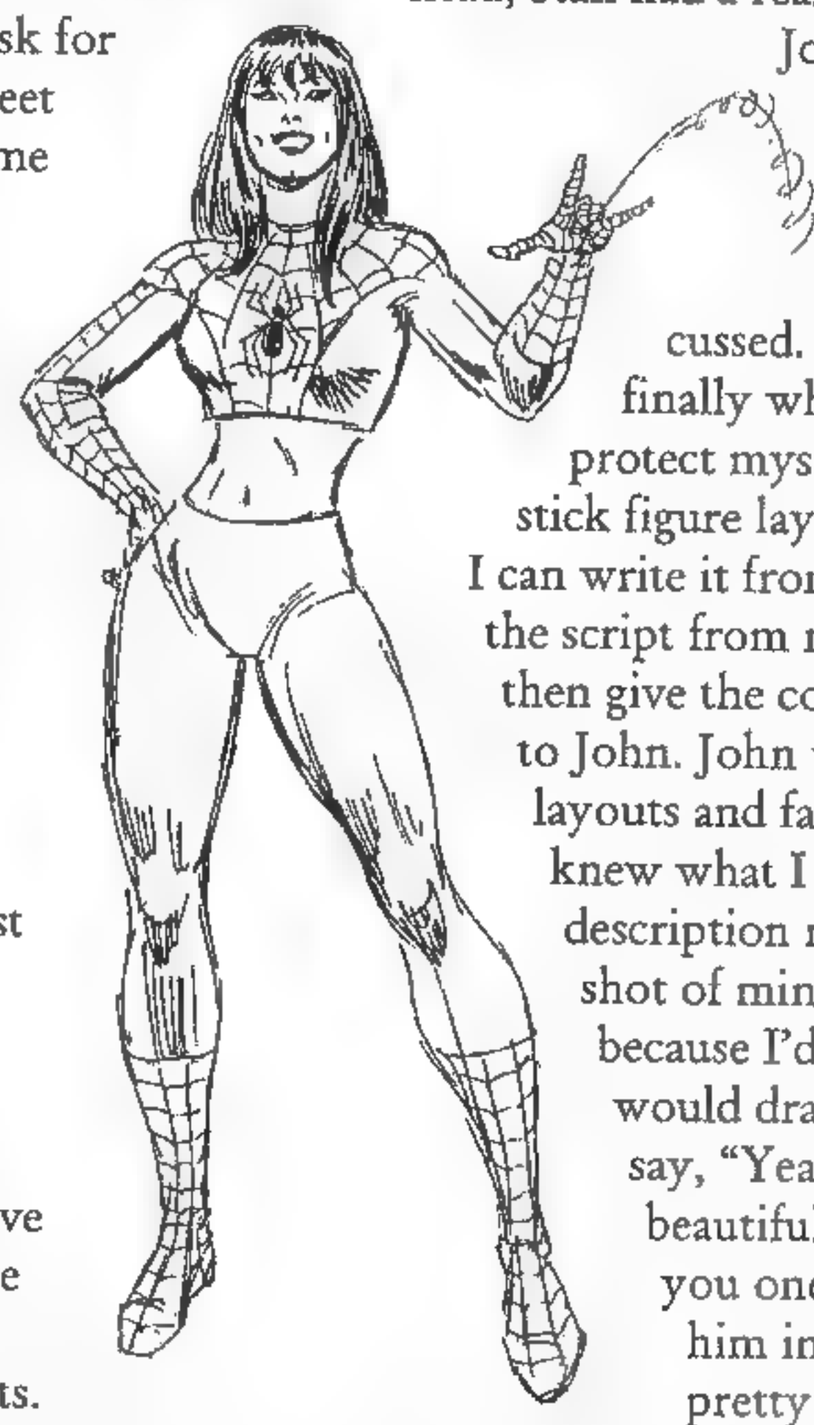
# JIM SHOOTER

*While you were Editor-in-Chief, John became Art Director . . .*

Well just before I took over, John had left to devote all his time to the *Spider-Man* newspaper strip. And when the strip first started out, it did well and was in a lot of papers. He was in the office every day because Stan was writing it, and he wanted John there. And Stan had enough clout, so who was going to argue with him? So John was there. And of course, if John is there then people are going to go and bother him. Kids are going to come in and ask for advice, tours are going to stop and meet John Romita. People are going to come and ask him questions, so I'm sure he was going crazy. When he was interested in coming back on staff I was happy to have him. I think by that time Virginia had become my Traffic Manager. She had gone from being my secretary to being Traffic Manager, and that was kind of nice because her office was next to John's. They didn't work together, but they were still around the same place.

Something I should mention by the way, it's a little known fact. In my last couple of months as associate editor before I became Editor-in-Chief in 1977, Stan had just started the *Spider-Man* strip with John. Stan did all his writing by himself, but he liked to have someone help him plot things, because he had a lot on his plate, and it was good to have somebody write the plots. You'd talk it out with Stan and somebody else would come up with all the details. He tried working with Len Wein, but that didn't work out. After Stan and Len didn't work out, Stan wanted another writer. Although it was prestigious to be working with Stan on the strip, no one would take the job. Everybody was sort of afraid that Stan would hate their stuff. At that time, I hadn't done a lot of writing for Marvel. Archie Goodwin was Editor-in-Chief, and Stan asked him for a list of all the writers. So then they ranked them in order, and Archie kept saying, "This Shooter guy is OK." Stan kept saying, "I don't know, he hasn't written anything, I'm not sure." I was number thirty-three on the list. They asked everybody else, and no one took it. Finally they came to me. I started writing the plots and Stan said, "Gee, you're really good. I always thought you were an idiot." So now that I was writing these plots, that meant working with John. I would write the plots, and then Stan would give the plots to John, and John would draw them. At first we were having a little communication problem. I was writing plots verbally and talking them out with Stan. I had a real clear picture in my head, Stan had a real clear picture in his head, but John wasn't at those meetings, he was busy drawing. So then when he would get the descriptions, what he would draw wouldn't be what we had discussed. Then Stan would yell at me. So finally what happened was, in order to protect myself, I started doing these ugly little stick figure layouts. Stan said, "Hey this is great! I can write it from the layouts." So he would write the script from my little stick figure layouts, and then give the completed script with the layouts to John. John would take one look at my layouts and fall off his chair laughing, but he knew what I meant. He would know what the description meant, and he'd be able to take a shot of mine and fix it. It was kind of keen because I'd draw something ugly, and John would draw something amazing, and I'd say, "Yeah, that's what I meant. That's beautiful, that's what I meant." I'll tell you one funny thing about John. I got him in trouble . . . I understood Stan pretty well, and Stan wanted the strip to be sexy. Not overt, but he wanted people to look at Mary Jane and say, "Wow." John is kind of a choir boy, I think at one point in his life he was going to be a priest. So if I would do a close-up shot of Mary Jane in my little layouts, I would always draw a bust shot in a low-neck sweater. Well John, he'd change that real quick to a head shot. Then Stan would go through the roof and say, "What are you doing? We want to see her figure!" So I kept getting him into trouble. I remember this one shot I did of people waiting at a bus stop, with Peter Parker walking toward the bus stop. It was one of those floor level perspectives, so you had a kind of slight up angle on this girl wearing a skirt, standing at the bus stop.





*Mary Jane TM & ©1998 Marvel Characters, Inc. All Rights Reserved.*

Now that's not lewd or anything. John wouldn't draw that. He changed that perspective in a hurry! So I kept starting these arguments between he and Stan by calling for these shots that he didn't feel comfortable drawing. That was a good time. We had a great time. I did that for a while, and in the middle of that I was promoted Editor-in-Chief, and once I was Editor-in-Chief, I was working like twenty-four hours a day and I couldn't keep up with it. Stan really wanted me to keep doing it, but I just couldn't, and so he hired his brother, Larry. I had established the way it was done with the layouts and stuff, and so Larry kept doing it the way I was doing it except his drawings were better than mine. So that became the way it was done from that point on, as long as John was doing it. So anyway, John and I worked pretty closely together, and I gave him a hard time. But we had a lot of fun.

*When you think of John's contributions to Marvel, what comes to mind?*

Well the first thing that comes to mind is too numerous to mention. I think there was a long period of time where John was really the only force that was working in favor of quality and professionalism. There was a period of time where comics were pretty down, and anybody who got any good at all would quickly leave. John insisted on standards. Spider-Man should look like Spider-Man. He couldn't save the whole ship, but he was sure shoring up the bottom. He insisted on and maintained some standards of professionalism. Back in the mid-seventies, which were very dark times for the comics industry, he was the whole foundation of that place [Marvel]. When things started to improve, well then it wasn't a question of holding up the bottom anymore, it was a question of training the next generation. You know, of working on new things like the strip, and all the other things that we got into after that. We started getting into films, and it was just great to have such an accomplished artist there who was so much a part of the foundation of Marvel. I mean, you didn't have to tell him anything, he knew. As a matter of fact, you had to un-tell him stuff. [*laughs*] We had so many arguments because he would remember every word that Stan ever told him. I would say, "Do it this way." And he would say, "Stan wouldn't like that." I'd say, "I don't care, he's not here. Just do it my way." So sometimes we would have these long debates about philosophy. Like, is it OK for John Byrne to draw the *Fantastic Four* a little differently? Or should we have John [Romita] correct them to look like Kirby's? I think we always came up with the right answer. We got into some interesting philosophical debates. I was very, very happy that he was there, and that Virginia was there during the time I was. I know they retired a while ago, and it's a sad thing for Marvel. But for all of Marvel's glory years, John was a brick in the foundation. He was fundamental to the success of Marvel.

*He [John] was fundamental to the success of Marvel.*

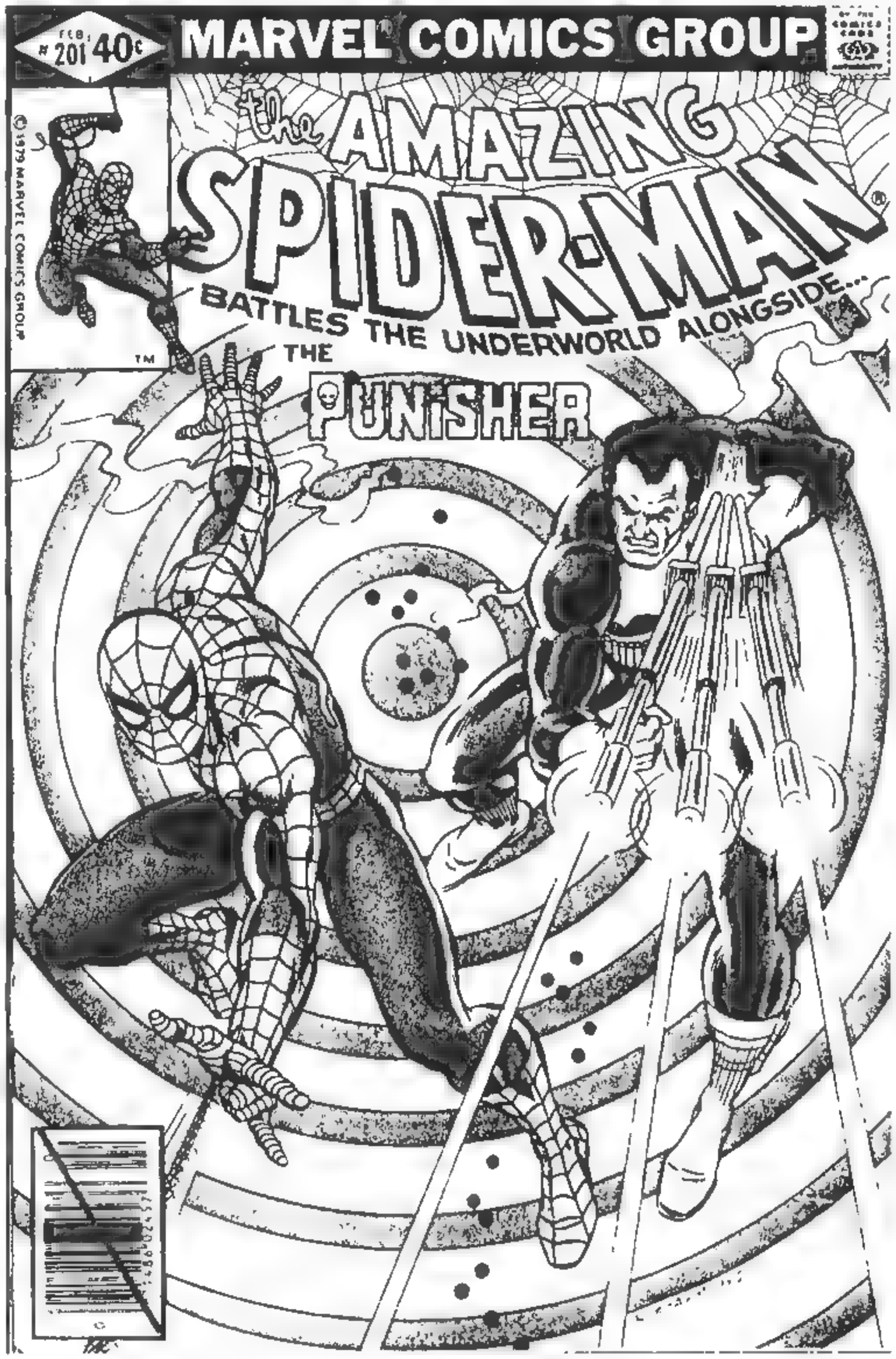
*As an artist, what would you say his best quality is?*

It's going to sound funny, but I would say glamor. Everything he drew had an appeal to it. Stan always used to say that the mistake that other people would make when they did monsters was they would make them repulsive and ugly. He would say, "Ugly's OK, but you have to be glamorous-ugly." As a concept, it's really a tough thing, but if you think about it, it's really true. The Hulk doesn't make you cringe. He had an appeal to him even though he's a monster. And John understood that concept better than anybody. His work always projected an appeal. Did he do everything else well? Yeah. He told a story, he could draw real well, he was good in just about every way. But the thing that really set him apart, I think, was he understood that concept that this stuff has to be glamorous, it has to have an appeal, and that's why Hollywood movies use beautiful stars. The same thing applies here. It's all part of making it work. I can't tell you how many times we'd be looking at a book, sometimes ours, just looking at it and saying, "Look at these ugly people." That's part of what he taught the kids, you know, ugly's OK, but it's like when you go to a movie, you want people to like it. You want them to like the whole experience, you want there to be glamor. That was his special thing. ❖

# GERRY CONWAY

*One character the two of you worked on together is The Punisher. Could you recount for us the creation of the Punisher and how John was involved in coming up with the final look of the character?*

Originally I created the Punisher as a villain for Spider-Man, as an adjunct to another character, The Jackal. I intended the Jackal to be a continuing villain, but had no such plans for the Punisher until I was well into the script. The Punisher was heavily influenced by Don Pendleton's "Executioner" paperback series, as well as the Dirty Harry movies, and was intended to highlight the anti-social aspects of those character types. Hence, his origin as a villain. But I found myself becoming more sympathetic to the character as the story developed, and he turned into a man with honorable intentions misled into a dishonorable deed.




As I did with every character I created in those days, I made a rough pencil sketch of my ideas for the Punisher's outfit as a guide to the artist. I never expected the artists to follow my notions except in a general way; they usually had better visual ideas. My original sketch for the Punisher showed him in an all-black jumpsuit much like the one John designed, but with a small skull mid-chest. John's brilliant design contribution was in expanding the skull and turning the skull's "teeth" into an ammo belt.

*Can you describe the working relationship the two of you had while you were writing the Amazing Spider-Man? How much plotting input did John have?*

When John pencilled Spider-Man, he received first position credit (ie: Art by John Romita, Script by Gerry Conway). This was a unique positioning, and it reflected John's unique contribution to the stories. In effect, John was my editor. I would propose story ideas and we'd develop the story together. John would then draw the issue in question, pacing and interpreting the plot as he went along. I don't think we ever had a written story synopsis on any of the issues John pencilled, at least, not after the first couple I wrote. I don't think I've worked without a written plot with any other artist in comics except one — Ross Andru. Like John, Ross had a wonderful storytelling sense. John understands how to tell a story visually, with economy and drama. ❖



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*Back in the 60's, John had decided to get out of the comic book business, and you changed his mind. What did you see in his work that caused you to be so persuasive?*
Oh I had just been a fan of his work since the first day I saw it. He not only draws beautifully, but he has the other talent that is needed in comics, he tells a story beautifully with his drawing. Some people can draw very well, but they're not good in telling a story. But John tells his story clearly and interestingly, and that's so important. He treats the characters as though they're actors in a movie, and every panel is just the right scene. And nobody has ever drawn more handsome men or more gorgeous, glamorous women than John.

*What can you tell us about your upcoming online project with John?*
I wish I knew. Actually, I had done a story with John years ago, called the "Femizons." We only did one story, it was a ten pager, and it was in a book called *Savage Tales*. I loved the job he did on it so much, the way he drew it. I liked the idea of the story so much that I never used it again and I convinced our publisher to give me ownership of that particular strip, figuring we'd do it someday in the future. In fact, I have some people interested in doing it as a TV series. But I thought that if John and I do something on the internet, it would be great to re-do the "Femizons" because there's nothing like it anywhere. The only thing is I'm waiting to find out is if John has the time to do it and so forth. It's difficult because we're three thousand miles apart. I'm very busy and John, I believe, is much busier than he expected to be when he retired.

*I've read where you disagree with the notion that John Romita was not a fast artist?*
That's right. He has always said that he wasn't fast but nothing could be further from the truth. I think John Romita is one of the fastest artists in the industry. But, he's also a perfectionist. He'd keep refining his art-work, even though the initial version would look perfect. I would always tell him that he was better than he thought. I'd say, "Your worst drawing is as good as anyone else's best, even better!"

*What effect do you think he's had on the comics industry?*
Well that's so hard to say, not only for him but for anybody. I think any effect he had had to be a good one. And I think all of the young upcoming artists who used to use his work as a reference had to be improved by doing that, because anybody who refers to John's work would learn the elements of good drawing and the elements of good storytelling. So he's had an excellent effect on comics.

One of the greatest qualities about John that made him so valuable to Marvel and such a pleasure to work with was his versatility. Because whatever strip was needed John could do it. If I suddenly needed a new Spider-Man, or a new Iron Man, or a new Daredevil, or Fantastic Four, it didn't matter what it was he could do it and he could do it magnificently. So just to have the services of someone like John Romita available made someone like me feel very secure.

John has always been one of the most generous and helpful people that I have had the pleasure of working with. He was always willing to help other artists over the years. He would always share his time and his talent with others. John is not only an awesomely talented artist, but one of the nicest, most decent human beings you could ever hope to meet. ❖

THAT LEAVES ONLY TWO THINGS LEFT TO SAY!
FLIP ME A FLEER--THE CARD OF CHOICE!
THWIPP
AND WHAT'S THE SECOND?
MAKE MINE MARVEL!
THAT'S MY BOY!
NEXT--THE 1992 ANNUAL REPORT!
Stan Lee and Spider-Man converse in a Marvel Quarterly report. Alex Saviuk pencils and Romita inks.

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# WHO ARE THEY?

*In addition to John's wife Virginia and his younger son John (Victor is his older son), we presented eleven supporting interviews. Here is a brief rundown about the rest of the contributors for this issue.*

**Mike Burkey** Considered by many to be the foremost collector of John Romita Spider-Man art.

**Gerry Conway** Former writer and editor for Marvel and DC. He was the supervising producer on Players last year and is currently working on the Hercules television series.

**Chris Ivy** Is an inker whose work has appeared in numerous books. He is currently the regular inker on the *Flash*.

**Stan Lee** Since an entire issue devoted to Stan could not do justice to everything he has accomplished let's just say that he's a legend in this industry.

**Graham Nolan** Former artist on *Detective Comics*. He has several projects in the works including a Superman one-shot and *Monster Island* which will be published by his own Compass Comics in the fall.

**Jose Marzan, Jr.** A prolific and talented artist whose work has graced numerous titles. His current work includes *Action Comics*.

**Mike Pascale** Creator of *Bru-Hed* and *Nasti: Monster Hunter*. Both are published by Schism Comics.

**Jim Shooter** Former Editor-in-Chief at Marvel from 1978 to 1987. He has also been involved with Defiant Comics and Broadway Comics.

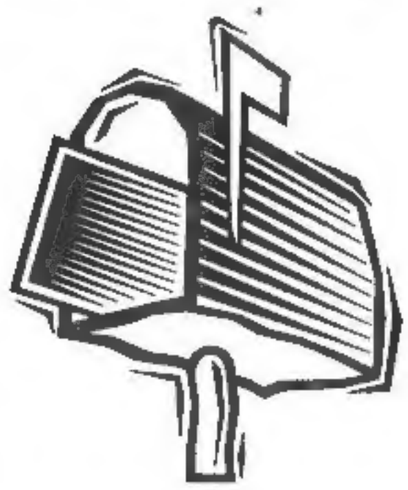
**Stephen D. Sullivan** A former editor and artist for TSR Inc. His work has included *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Adventures*.

**Roy Thomas** In a career that spans over thirty years, he has written many titles for both DC and Marvel including *Avengers*, *Conan The Barbarian*, and *All-Star Squadron*.

**Keith Williams** Has worked on several Mask miniseries for Dark Horse. He is currently working on *The Phantom*.

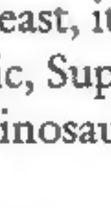
Spider-Man, Wolverine, and Captain America *TM & ©1998 Marvel Characters, Inc. All Rights Reserved.*

# LETTERS



Dear CBP
I made the happy discovery of stumbling across Issue No. 3 and, being a fan of Neal Adams (both the man and his work), I bought your book without hesitation.
I was greatly impressed with the entire issue. What I appreciated most was the fact that you avoided all of the obvious slants to such a feature, such as focusing almost entirely on his more-commercially triumphant work on Green Lantern and Batman, and cast the spotlight across virtually his entire career. I also enjoyed the sidebar opinions of so many of his peers (Harlan Ellison's contribution alone was priceless!).
Adams, as always, is a controversial figure. I enjoy hearing his articulate opinions, but I'm also happy that you did not wallow in it; too many other publications give in to the temptation to turn a simple interview into an all-out attack on other individuals or even entire comic companies. It might sell a few more issues, but overall it detracts from the importance of your piece, and it stirs up unneeded animosity as well.
I am a bit torn over your decision to sacrifice art for additional interview space. Although I applaud your decision in the main, I'd much prefer to see you shrink the print font on each page, thus freeing up space for artwork. Also, might I recommend that in the future you combine several pieces of art to form a montage on the cover? (At the very least, it would have been amusing to see Ms. Mystic, Superman and Atomic Mouse swooping down on the dinosaur that was menacing the X-Men!)
All-in-all, I was mightily impressed with *Comic Book Profiles*, and I'm looking forward to No. 4, featuring one of the all-time greats, John Romita, Sr.
Best wishes,
Gene Popa

*Gene, as you can see, we have indeed decreased the point size to allow us to accommodate more artwork and more interviews. Glad to have you on board and we hope you liked this issue. I should also mention that readers Gia Cam Luc and Peter Wallace also suggested using smaller font size.*



Dear Tina ...
I 'd I like to compliment your staff on the Neal Adams issue. Certainly the initial two efforts were wonderful, yet I sensed more of the staff getting a better feel for the format and design with this production.
For example, I enjoyed the interview section with the artist (Adams) primarily printed in its entirety, with supporting comments and observations by professional peers as a secondary section (in the first three issues I was annoyed by the random boxes or sections of text by co-writers and associates ... I just found that format distracting!). In this issue, all of Neal's interview was relatively self-contained, and then neatly followed by the supporting interviews. It just seemed to have a better "flow" to this reader.
As a proud subscriber, will I be notified when my term is near expiration ? I'd hate to miss an issue!
Thanks for your time and interest.
Best and continued success ...
Charles DiVincenti Jr.

*Charles, this issue we made an effort to separate the interviews into different sections. What does everybody think of this format as opposed to the original format where we tried to blend the supporting interviews with the main interview? And yes, you will be sent a renewal reminder before your subscription expires. We wouldn't want you to miss an issue, either!*

*I want to take a moment to mention two positive reviews that Comic Book PROFILES has recently received. One was from the Comic Book Electronic Magazine editor David LeBlanc. If you are interested in checking out this weekly magazine you can do so at www.members.aol.com/ComicBkNet. The second review was from Tony Isabella in his weekly Tony's Tips column. The address for that column is www.wfcomics.com/tony. Thanks guys!*

*Well, I've run out of room. Take care, and I hope to meet you back here in 90!*

*Remember our address is:*
***As You Like It Publications, P.O. Box 2055, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601 and the e-mail address is CBPROFILES@aol.com.***

## WHAT'S ON DECK?

# JOHN BYRNE

In our next issue, John Byrne talks to us about his career from his work on the X-Men to Superman to his latest project, Spider-Man. As always, there will be many supporting interviews from friends and associates of John's including; award winning author Larry Niven, Concrete creator Paul Chadwick, X-men inker Tim Townsend, Superman writer Dan Jurgens, and writer/columnist Tony Isabella. And as always, Fred Hembeck's Final Thoughts.

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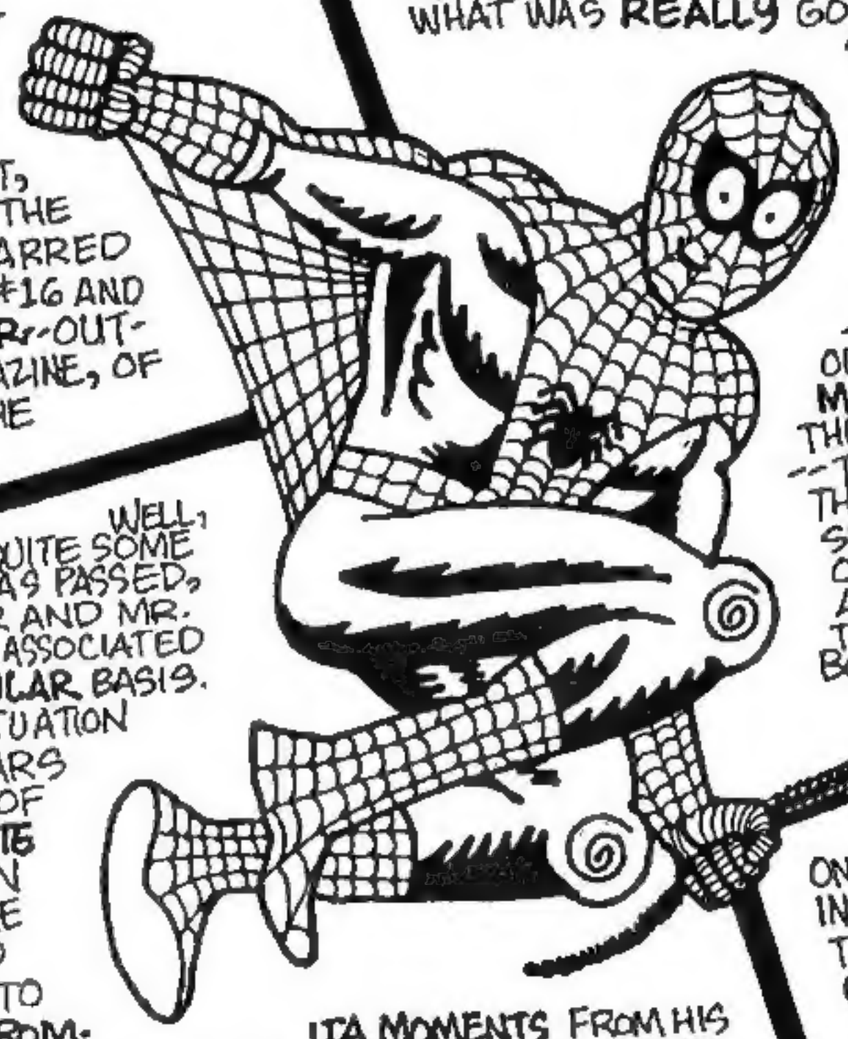
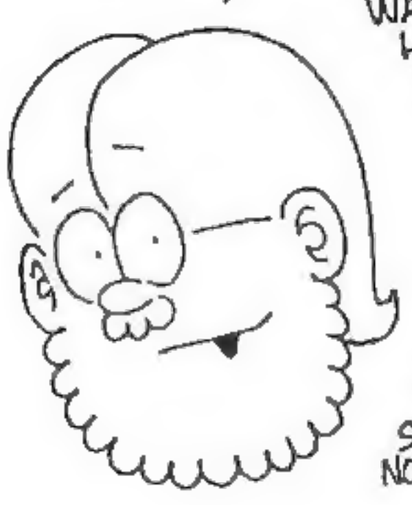
# HEMBECK'S FINAL THOUGHTS

**JACK KIRBY** COULDN'T DO IT. DESPITE BEING THE UNDISPUTED KING OF COMICS, HE NEVER COULD QUITE DRAW A **CONVINCING** SPIDER-MAN. WHEN THE WALL-CRAWLER--OR RATHER, A **ROBOT IMPOSTOR**--APPEARED IN Avengers #11 --**DON HECK'S** RENDITION DID **LITTLE** TO DISTINGUISH THIS ONE-OF-A-KIND CHARACTER FROM THE REST OF THE CAST. AND WHEN SPIDEY MET GIANT-MAN, **DICK AYER'S** PENCILS **FAILED** TO DEMONSTRATE **WHY** THIS PARTICULAR SUPERHERO STOOD APART FROM ALL THE REST. CLEARLY, ARTIST **STEVE DITKO** HAD A HIGHLY **PERSONAL** VISION OF HIS CO-CREATION, AND, BEING THE GENUINELY UNIQUE STYLIST THAT HE WAS (AND **IS**), **NO ONE** IN THE FLEDGLING DAYS OF THE MARVEL BULLPEN SEEMED CAPABLE OF COMING ANYWHERE **NEAR**, MUCH LESS **DUPLICATING** HIS TAKE ON THE IRRADIATED ARACHNID. AT LEAST, **NOT** UNTIL EARLY 1967, WHEN THE AMAZING MR. PARKER GUEST-STARRED WITHIN THE PAGES OF Daredevil #16 AND #17. THE WEB-SPINNER HAD **NEVER**--OUTSIDE THE PAGES OF HIS **OWN** MAGAZINE, OF COURSE--LOOKED **SO** GOOD, AND THE **ENTIRE** RESPONSIBILITY FOR THAT WAS THE DIRECT RESULT OF A

WELL, QUITE SOME TIME HAS PASSED, AND MR. PARKER AND MR. ROMITA ARE **NO LONGER** ASSOCIATED WITH ONE ANOTHER ON A **REGULAR** BASIS. I HADN'T GIVEN THE WHOLE SITUATION MUCH THOUGHT UNTIL, A FEW YEARS BACK, I WAS ASSIGNED THE TASK OF PRODUCING A **JOHN ROMITA TRIBUTE** FOR MY CENTERSPREAD STRIP IN Marvel Age MAGAZINE. AFTER SOME DELIBERATION AS HOW **BEST** TO APPROACH THIS JOB, I DECIDED TO CREATE A **MONTAGE** OF **KEY ROMITA MOMENTS** FROM HIS Amazing RUN, REDRAWN IN MY PECULIAR STYLE. HAVING PREVIOUSLY DONE THIS WITH THE ART OF **KIRBY**, **SWAN**, **INFANTINO**, AND, YES, **DITKO**--BUT FEW OTHERS--I WASN'T **QUITE** SURE HOW THIS WOULD **TURN OUT**. HOWEVER, IN **RESEARCHING** THE MATERIAL, LOOKING AT IT FOR THE **FIRST TIME IN AGES** WITH A FRESH AND UNBIASED EYE (AND BECAUSE, YUP, I **HAD** GROWN UP JUST A **LITTLE** IN THE INTERVENING YEARS), I WAS **ASTOUNDED** AT HOW **POWERFUL** AND **VIBRANT** THE VERY BEST OF THIS STUFF WAS. THE MONTAGE WAS A **JOY** TO COMPOSE, AND, IF ANYTHING, I HAD **MORE** GREAT MATERIAL **THAN I WAS** ABLE TO USE. TRUE, **ROMITA** WASN'T ALWAYS WELL SERVED BY HIS INKERS, BUT WHEN HE DID IT **ALL**, THE RESULTS WERE **DYNAMITE!** I MEAN, YEAH, I ALWAYS **KNEW** HIS STUFF WAS GOOD, BUT I HONESTLY HADN'T REALIZED JUST **HOW** GOOD. LOOKING BACK, THERE ARE THREE ISSUES IN PARTICULAR THAT I TREASURE AS MUCH AS **ANYTHING Stan** AND **STEVE** DID, NUMBERS 47, 48 AND 49. THE FIRST FEATURES THE RETURN OF KRAVEN the HUNTER, THE SECOND THE GENESIS OF A NEW, MORE POWERFUL YULTURE, AND THE THIRD--THE **CAPPER**--UNITES THIS PAIR OF ARCH FIENDS IN A BATTLE WITH A BELEAGUERED SPIDER-MAN, MADE **SO** MEMORABLE SINCE OUR HERO IS FIGHTING NOT **ONLY** THE BAD GUYS, BUT A **RAGING FLU** AS WELL--PLAYED OUT

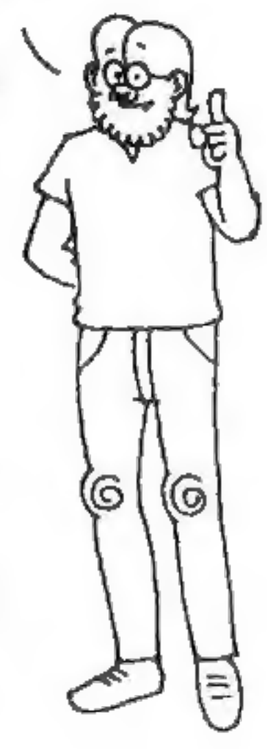




**RECENT** ADDITION TO THE NOW **BUROBONING** MARVEL BULLPEN, **JOHN ROMITA. LONG** BEFORE **Stan** HAD ANNOINTED HIM "RING-A-DING", HE'D TOILED MANY YEARS IN THE BUSINESS. HOWEVER, FOR AS LONG AS **I** HAD BEEN FOLLOWING THE FIELD UP TO THAT POINT, **MR. ROMITA** HAD BEEN WORKING ON DC'S **ROMANCE LINE**, AND THOUGH I'VE ALWAYS HAD A **DEEP LOVE** FOR THE FORM, I WAS AT AN AGE WHERE IT SEEMED **IMPROPER** FOR ANYONE OF **MY** GENDER TO HAVE THAT LOVE ENCOMPASS **LOVE COMICS!** NOPE, I **NEVER** PICKED A SINGLE ONE UP OFF THE RACK, WHICH IS A **SHAME**, SINCE THE HANDFUL I'VE EXAMINED IN RECENT YEARS CONTAIN **TREMENDOUS** ARTWORK. TO ME, **JOHN ROMITA** INITIALLY BURST INTO MY CONSCIOUSNESS AS THE REGULAR PENCILLER ON DAREDEVIL--**AND** AS A FELLOW WHO DREW A PRETTY DARN GOOD SPIDER-MAN, AS WELL. WHICH **I** THOUGHT WAS **GREAT. UNTIL**, THAT IS, HE ACTUALLY **TOOK OVER** ILLUSTRATING THE WEBHEADS' BOOK ABOUT SIX MONTHS LATER. UNDERSTAND THIS ABOUT ME: **STEVE DITKO** WAS AND ALWAYS WILL BE MY **FAVORITE** CARTOONIST. THE NEWS THAT HE WAS LEAVING MARVEL DEPRESSED ME **MORE** THAN WHEN **THE BEATLES** BROKE UP (**THAT**, AT LEAST, YOU COULD SEE COMING). GIVEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES, HOW COULD **I NOT** SEE **JOHN ROMITA** AS THE **INTERLOPER**? LOOK, I WAS **JUST** A DOPEY KID, GOING THROUGH A PROLONGED ADOLESCENCE (WHICH I'M **ALMOST** THROUGH, THANK YOU VERY MUCH)--WHAT DID **I** KNOW ABOUT WHAT WAS **REALLY** GOING ON? SURE, I **STUCK** WITH The Amazing Spider-Man--WITH **Stan Lee** STILL AT THE HELM, HOW COULD I **NOT**?--AND EVEN, OVER TIME, GREW TO GIVE "JAZZY JOHNNY" MY **GRUDGING RESPECT**. STILL, THE FACT THAT IT **WASN'T DITKO** WAS **NEVER** TOO FAR IN THE BACK OF MY MIND. AND THOUGH HE RACKED UP A **PRODIGIOUS** TENURE ON THE FEATURE --WHETHER IT BE PROVIDING PENCILS, INKS OR LAYOUTS AS PART OF A TEAM, OR **MOST EFFECTIVELY**, PRODUCING THE **ENTIRE** PACKAGE HIMSELF --THERE WAS **ALWAYS** THAT **GHOST** OF "STURDY STEVE" HANGING OVER MY SHOULDER AS I READ THOSE BOOKS.

AGAINST A BEAUTIFULLY PORTRAYED **SNOW COVERED** NEW YORK CITY! THE IMAGE OF A DEFEATED, UNCONSCIOUS SPIDER-MAN LYING PRONE ON HIS BACK ATOP A SNOW COVERED SKYSCRAPER AT THE CONCLUSION OF #418 IS ONE I'LL **ALWAYS** RECALL VIVIDLY. **Whew!** SO, IN CONCLUSION, CLASS, **WHAT** HAVE WE LEARNED? THAT WE **SHOULDN'T** COMPARE **APPLES** TO **ORANGES**? Uh huh. AND THAT WE **SHOULDN'T** BLAME ANYONE **ELSE** FOR **STEVE DITKO'S** CAREER CHOICES? Yup. AND THAT **JOHNNY ROMITA** IS A **TREMENDOUSLY GIFTED CARTOONIST** THAT I JUDGED USING UNFAIR CRITERIA DURING MY MISGUIDED YOUTH? OKAY, I'LL COP TO THAT. **AND** THAT THINGS COULD'VE BEEN **FAR** WORSE FOR OUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD SPIDER-MAN--AFTER ALL, **JACK KIRBY** COULD'VE TAKEN OVER THE BOOK! (Oh SURE, IT WOULD'VE BEEN **GOOD**, BUT **WOULD** IT'VE BEEN **SPIDER-MAN**?)

CENTER ILLO ALA ROMITA the FIRST AMAZING 418 SPLASH.



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COMIC BOOK NEXT ISSUE

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PRESENTS

# JOHN BYRNE

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